

THE
LIBERTINE AND INFIDEL

LED TO
REFLECTION,

BY
CALM EXPOSTULATION:

A METHOD

RECOMMENDED IN

A FAREWELL ADDRESS

TO HIS
YOUNGER BRETHREN,

BY

JOHN DUNCAN, D.D.
RECTOR OF SOUTH WARMBOROUGH, HANTS.

Ἀληθεύοντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

Speaking Truth in Love. Eph. iv. 15.

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LIBERTINE AND INDEPENDENT

1847

MANUFACTURING

BY

CALM & POSTERITY

The first number of the *Libertine and Independent* was published in 1847, and it was the only one of its kind in the country. It was published by the *Libertine and Independent* Press, and it was the only one of its kind in the country. It was published by the *Libertine and Independent* Press, and it was the only one of its kind in the country.



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INTRODUCTION.

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junction, and the apparently altered state of the public mind. It was reported that a dangerous revolution of sentiment, in religious, no less than in political concerns had risen to an alarming height in these kingdoms, caught by contagion from the Apostacy, which forms the most hideous feature in the baleful Anarchy, absurdly self-entitled the Republic of France.

Against this Apostacy, that threatens speedy destruction to our dearest hopes both in this life, and a better, various antidotes are administered in all the churches of Christendom. Their zealous endeavours are by some faint-hearted religionists, whose fearful apprehensions shall be duly obviated in the following pages, deemed likely to prove of little avail, wherever the French *Anarchy*, from which they suppose it to derive it's most fatal malignity, shall be permitted to gain ground. As that monstrous dissolution of all orderly and legal government is said to have endeared itself to a deluded party in this country, by assuming their favourite title of *Republic*, let me here be excused the insertion of an apposite remark to expose the absurdity of this assumption, and defend my assigning to it a more proper name.

Not all the dire effects of misrule and distraction still raging in that wretched country, kept up, and inflamed the more by the imposing brilliancy of
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of it's military atchievements, have it seems as yet opened the eyes of the lawless faction just alluded to, with respect to the perfidy of it's false pretensions. A short passage from the *Politica* of Aristotle, illustrated by a well-adapted figure, shall set the frenzy of it's fallacious claim in a striking light. Born a Macedonian, the sagacious Stagyrite felt impressive reasons not to be blindly enamoured of *Monarchy*, unlimited by good effective laws, wisely planned, and duly executed. He beheld with regret the gross abuses prevalent in several other Grecian states, and with indignation their impudence in miscalling themselves *Aristocracies*. He had rashly entertained a better opinion of those, where the supreme power was, by an undue latitude of expression, declared to reside *in the people at large*. Undeceived by experience, when the free exposition of his abhorrence of certain popular prejudices, and the baseness of the ringleaders of contending factions, who cherished, when they might have checked the growing evils, had inflamed against him both the *Sovereign Mob*, and it's profligate flatterers; he saw his life in extreme danger. He thought it high time to escape the doom of the most illustrious members of the wofully corrupt Athenian *Commonwealth*. He fled to Chalcis. He disdained to be the denizen of a state so notoriously perverted from it's boasted legal constitution. He abjured it's long-respected

respected claim to a title, upon which the shameless venality and profligacy of their unprincipled rulers concurred no less than the savage fury of an imperious populace to cast a foul dishonour. He asserted it might as properly be applied to an assemblage of the most ferocious kinds of wild beasts in a forest. In no point did the resemblance fail. In one it was remarkably exact. No peaceable or permanent establishment of common concerns could possibly be maintained in either.

How ever the honest wishes of every heart, that retained yet uncorrupt the natural feelings of humanity were united for the success of a wise and just reform of a government so miserably ill-administered as that of the French Monarchy, most painfully must we now concur in deploring the atrocious consequences of a revolution, the conduct of which fell into the hands of the vilest wretches that ever disgraced the name of Patriot, or Assertor of the rights of man. What must the temper of that mind be, which can fail to sympathise with our general consternation, in viewing so large a portion of mankind driven to abjure at once all reverence for the authority, not of an earthly only, but of a heavenly Sovereign? With various degrees of horror, no doubt, every virtuous, every pious breast has felt the shock, but not all, by the grace of God, with those desperate emotions of melancholy,

melancholy, which are exhibited by many a self-tormented zealot, who thus plainly indicate in themselves a feeble trust in Providence.

Unluckily some questionable symptoms often accompany these exhibitions of extreme despondency.—Is the object of their timid apprehension the danger threatened against the permanency of those truths, which the word of God is well understood to enforce throughout, as of prime necessity to regulate first our moral conduct, and then our consequent hopes and fears?—Is not their concern so entirely devoted to the stability of certain human ordinances, and disputed modes of faith, that it precludes all attention to the former, as of little moment in comparison?—Or is not their alarm, at a supposed approaching failure of respect for the said mere modes which are by them esteemed the whole essence of religion?—Is their zeal for the perpetuity of abuses supposed to be inseparably connected with the said ordinances, whether civil or ecclesiastical, rightly applied, and properly defended by the parable of the Tares, cast into the field of good corn, and difficult, when both are grown up together, to be safely extirpated?—Upon these queries a little light is attempted to be thrown in the following chapters. Others occur to the mind of the Writer, of which it would ill become him to hazard a direct solution.—Of these *mala bene posita*, as they are called, we
perhaps

perhaps may wish, but can we reasonably soon expect to see our sincerely revered establishments in Church and State legally, and without convulsions, disencumbered?—Have any well-adapted remedies for these evils been hitherto proposed?—Is this the proper season for applying them?—Or is not this position of all impartial men the most admissible: that the most likely means to reach the root of the malady has been unexplored as yet, or purposely disregarded on all sides, however pressing the necessity may be for their full and free, though temperate and equitable discussion?

Far from presaging, as some presumed religious, but perhaps rather political bigots commonly affect (not in this single point alone, at unison with the professed unbelieving tribes) the approaching downfall, or extirpation of Christianity, let us remain firmly persuaded that the lamentable outcries of the affrighted pietist, and the short-lived exultation of the petulant *fool*, who contends in vain to “*say in his heart, there is no God,*” shall at an awful period, not far distant, nay at the next moment present to the youngest healthiest individual now alive, be declared to have been the suggestions of a weak distempered brain. They will assuredly, when the counsels of heaven shall be more distinctly revealed to eyes no longer mortal, be discerned to be as contradictory to sound reason, as they are to the word of God himself, announced

nounced by the ever-blessed Founder of our holy religion, of that rock, the firm foundations of which are so immoveable, that not (*πυλαι ἀδύ,*) all the assaults of Death and Hell, shall overthrow them to the end of time. The divine sanctions, given to it's truth, by our Saviour himself, were alone sufficient to maintain it's resistless force of evidence for ever unimpaired.

Many a subsequent display of an over-ruling Providence enabled the sacred Palm to expand itself the more, under the extreme pressure of the direst excesses of Pagan fury. Let me here call your attention to a *type*, or aid to a faint conception of a blessed future event, of which the existent state of the world, moral and religious, now presents no near prospect to the drooping spirits of many a good and true believer. For ever memorable was the glorious issue of the tenth, or *exterminating* persecution, as it was stiled, under Dioclesian; with the astonishing circumstances and effects of which, the unlearned reader may be not at all acquainted. At that disastrous æra, the light of the gospel appeared, for a few years, to be doomed to a speedy extinction. Little was it then suspected that this portentous gloom was but preparatory to a brighter day, ordained to last to all succeeding ages. The dreadfulest excesses of insult, outrage, torture, massacre, inflicted upon the confessors of Christ, which according to Eusebius,

sebius, an unexceptionable eye-witness, exceeded all his most painful efforts of description, proved, in the language of modern philosophy, the accidental, but in that of rational piety, the providential cause of it's rapidly surmounting the fiercest opposition of it's astonished foes, and receiving a greater accession of strength from their desperate attacks than from the nine preceding persecutions. In vain did Maximian, the obsequious instrument of hatred, and adopted colleague of the merciless emperor, boast that by their joint efforts they had utterly destroyed the very name of Christianity, and restored for ever their athiestical superstition, or avowed irreligion upon it's ruins. In vain did they proclaim this impious vaunt in all parts of the empire, in Spain, in Italy, in Gaul, in Britain. Of this presumptuous boast memorials are yet extant in several antique inscriptions, in different parts of Spain.

Never was the Supreme overruling hand more visible than it was in defeating their "counsels against the Lord and his anointed." It was precisely at that critical period that our holy faith acquired that invincible strength and stability, which not all the malice and violence of unprincipled potentates, not even the more deleterious errors and vices of Christian priests, or the mad enthusiasm of their followers have since essentially shaken. Then did the newly reerected altars of
pagan

pagan idolatry as suddenly crumble into dust, never to rise again. Let the blessed event that succeeded these transient horrors be present to our undisturbed recollection. There expressly prefigured let us now, with soothing comfort and reviving hope contemplate the serene termination of the Gallic hurricane, that still convulses half the globe. Shall the frantic menace loudly echoed to us from the evil spirits, that conduct the storm, of annihilating all the evidence of established truth, all the best approved laws of order and good government, persuade one pious, one loyal friend of either, that heaven will permit the faithless lawless crew finally to prevail in expunging both for ever, as obsolete and unprofitable? What are the high-sounding promises which they have the audacity to hold forth, as pledges and securities for their permanent integrity, and good-will to mankind? Universal peace, equal rights, general happiness. Will the Lord, that "frustrateth the tokens of the liars," not laugh them to scorn? Will not the havoc, wrongs and wretchedness they have produced, and are still producing, undeceive their passionate admirers? The interested abettors of Anarchy themselves must begin soon to see conviction crowd in upon them from all quarters, that it's penal dissolution cannot be very far distant.

Let the faint-hearted Christian learn to recognize

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in the very elements, or plainest first principles of the faith he professes, an incontestible warrant for a confident expectation that some great and permanent future good shall arise from the present deplorable extremes of transient evil. Let this consideration inspire him to anticipate a re-established and peaceable order of things, secretly advancing to maturity, and unforeseen perfection. An invisible hand is directing alike the self-destructive licence of the Libertine, and rage of the Anarchist, on the one side, and the blind obstinacy of the Bigot, and the adorer of Despotism, and of all established abuses on the other, to a beneficent purpose. They are both, we trust, the unconscious instruments of a merciful Providence, to accelerate an improved and renovated system, upon which it is not given to any human understanding to speculate exactly, being such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it yet entered into the heart of man clearly to conceive."

In a fastidious reader of either description such sentiments as these will not meet with the slightest sympathy, and will of course be honoured with their marked reprobation. A more impartial critic will allow them to be not improperly introductory to the purport of the following enlargement of an unfinished work.—It is prepared,

• 1 Cor. li. 9.

with

with somewhat better prospect of success, from more deliberate exertions, to encounter the swarms of infidel declaimers, whose harsh dissonance is perhaps less grating to the ear in the basest haunts of vulgar intercourse, than it is offensive to the noblest emotions of the heart, in many of those, which a civil misnomer stiles the politer circles, where a lawless Licence, and unblushing Ignorance, are aiming perpetually to discredit, and laugh out of countenance all fixed principles moral or religious, where a disgraceful ridicule is cast upon the once respected titles of Christian, of Philosopher, of Patriot, of Friend of our excellent, (though not unimprovable) British Constitution in Church and State. It has indicated expressly the source of their loose and impious tenets. It has grounded that imputation upon the authority of Reason as well as upon Scripture. It has evinced them to spring from *their ungodly lusts*. It has declared their aversion to be manifested alike to *natural* as to revealed religion, in spite of their loud asseverations to the contrary, self-contradicted by their visible impatience to endure the restraints enjoined by either.

The Writer, though unwilling to provoke, is compelled to incur also the expected displeasure of certain adversaries not less outrageously reproachful. The bigotted disparagers of all human reasoning upon religious subjects will passionately condemn

demn his recommending to the clergy of the rising generation, the freest exercise of their mental faculties, in the critical scrutiny of their unsound arguments, adduced to prove that any of those perplexing doctrines, which appear to have never yet been intelligibly expounded, can without an insult to common sense be deemed a fundamental part of what we equally at least with them revere, and more consistently call a divine *revelation*. Their most violent invectives will be against his venturing to propose what he esteems the sole unequivocal test of a *fundamental* article of faith—It's being essentially connected with purity of manners, and integrity of heart—it's tending necessarily to confirm our belief in the certainty of a future judgment, of a reward after death to the righteous, of punishment to the impenitent, and of mercy to the penitent sinner.

Uncompliant indeed to the example of arrogance, which they pretend in vain to set us, while they stray infinitely beyond the ken of human apprehension, in what they affect to call the only true mode of "*preaching Christ*," he has rather chosen to conform himself to the perfect pattern delivered to us by our Blessed Master himself, in his admirable discourse upon the mount, which was expressly adapted to correct the false prejudices, which the ignorant multitude of his countrymen had been taught to conceive, with respect to the doctrines,

doctrines, office, or expected kingdom of the Messiah, but especially to the moral purposes of his mission. Their notions were gross, were palpably fallacious, but not so absurdly subtle as those which perplex the undisciplined fancy of many a well-meaning enthusiast of modern date. To such an audience he uttered not a sentence tending to confound yet more what he found already miserably confused. He imparted throughout the clearest light and improvement to their understanding, animation and activity to their judgments, destitute indeed of right information, but not of honesty or docility.

The model of their Divine Instructor in preaching the gospel was punctually followed by his immediate Apostles. The mode we know, that was applied by St. Paul, to expound and inculcate the faith of Christ to the corrupt Jewish Governor Felix: * He *reasoned* of righteousness, temperance and a judgment to come. How evidently, how essentially was his *method* different from that now in use among the vehement declaimers of a contentious sect, who having *separated* themselves from our church, on account of our love of peace and harmony, persist in spreading through the nation a preposterous reproach against it, as *heretical*, which means 'perversely given to strife

* Acts xxiv. 25.

and

and opposition. God forbid that any rational conformist to our mild establishment should presume to judge, or call in question the sincerity of many worthy men amongst them, in their devotion to what they profess. However justly we may disapprove their method of interpreting scripture, "*† to their own Master they stand or fall.*" He alone can discern infallibly the purity of their intentions. Let us imitate the zealous, but benevolent Apostle to the Romans. Let us decline imposing peremptorily, or till we thoroughly understand, and can reasonably prove their propriety, our own sentiments or phrases upon them. Only this we may fairly assert, that theirs must appear to us mere phrases, without sentiments, until they can explain them intelligibly. In the mean time the constant tenor of their speeches will justify our assertion that they have no right notion of the genuine spirit of the religion they profess; since in their mode of expounding the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, they declare them to bear perpetual enmity with human reason.

It is on the contrary our steady trust, and unfailing fund of satisfaction, that Christianity, instead of depressing reason, will be found of all the gifts of heaven the best adapted to inform, to improve and exalt it. But the men, whose minds are

† Rom. xiv. 4.

warped to their dismal bias cannot easily be brought to resign themselves to the happy influence of this gloom-dispelling principle : that all it's most important saving truths are plain and level to all capacities. It is this alone that can inspire us uniformly to sanctify to it's proper use all our knowledge, secular or spiritual, which if applied to no beneficial purpose in life, however proudly it may "puff us up, edifieth not," partaketh not of wisdom, piety or charity, of any religious or moral excellence ; it is really of little worth. Whether after all, the first Sketch of this Address has utterly escaped the notice of either of the opposite, but equally self-confuted disputants above alluded to, the Writer has had little opportunity to inquire. But he begs leave to mention the effect produced in his mind by the reception it has met with from readers happily quite dissimilar from both, by the concurrent liberal commendation, which all the best-approved Reviewers of new publications, without a single exception, have thought fit to bestow upon a tract of such slight pretensions, flattering to no party, but in some respects freely imputing blame to all.

An applause from different quarters, greatly surpassing his humble expectation, impelled him to a more careful and strict examination of a hasty performance, that issued solely from his own immediate sense of the moral and religious aspect of

the times, and some disgust at many injudicious exhibitions of it, proceeding from inconsistent principles. Desirous to render it more worthy of the approbation so honourably conferred upon it, he felt himself encouraged to complete the design he had traced for a work, the defective execution of which was painfully perceived by himself, though in consideration perhaps of its obvious tendency, uncensured by his discerning literary judges. This fresh exertion was soon interrupted, and hitherto rendered ineffective by the troublous circumstances of our national affairs. These have since occupied so entirely the attention of the public, and so naturally cooperated with the force inertly strong of an indolent period of life, that its struggling now against these ready pleas for inactivity may be justly allowed to have no other motive so cogent as a desire to be found at the close of a long pilgrimage, (neither weary nor unpleasant, but thankfully, hopefully still protracted,) discharging with his best abilities, that duty to the gracious Giver of all blessings, which he has most at heart.

The present state of all public concerns, though apparently pointing to a serener peaceful season, precludes all near expectancy that his still small voice can possibly obtain a hearing, amid the ferment of conflicting passions, the exultations of unparalleled victories, and the cries of signal distresses; or that notice can probably be conveyed, through

through a few kind surviving friends, that these, his "*more last words*," have been listened to, with the same indulgence as the former. He has nevertheless, upon two accounts, been induced to arrange the result of his thoughts, which have at intervals occurred, for giving an ampler scope to his unfinished plan.—He is beginning now to entertain a clearer expectation than has been allowed for some years past that the general disquietude of spirit from national dangers too justly apprehended, and distresses too impatiently endured, will ere long, by the mercy of a Providence, invisible still to infidels and libertines, be disposed to subside. We may then be the better inclined to attend to "*the things that belong to our lasting and righteous covenant of peace*." We may be more at leisure to turn our distracted thoughts to our truest interests in a life, where the joys are solid, pure and permanent, where terror, sorrow, sin, the sting of death, and death itself shall disquiet them no more for ever.

An additional inducement conspired with this fond hope of a favourable change in our national character, in urging him to set his hand again to the work. This was the obliging suggestion of a sincere friend, with respect to certain points, which could not be completely unfolded in the brief compendium, or first edition of this work. "They were liable, he said, to objection, from
" the

“the mistakes of prejudiced or superficial readers. He indeed understood their purport well—he approved them entirely, as the Author was always wont, without reserve, explicitly to deliver them, in private conference.”—The subjects were the following: the necessity of allowing a latitude, in the interpretation of established articles of Subscription, and even of Scripture itself: the prudent control of an honest zeal for what is called Reform or Innovation. The present conduct, principles and views of the Dissenters of all denominations, the latest especially, most virulent and encreasing sect. It was the wish of many of his respected friends that he would be mindful of the promise they had obtained from him, to treat more largely in the plan he was about to fulfil, of the gross calumnies, the Methodists absurdly vent against the regular Clergy. They desired him to recollect his regret at the ill success of his own urgency with his late excellent friend, Dr. Balguy, upon the expediency of his filling up the outlines he had drawn for completing his admirable Tract, “Divine Benevolence asserted.” Failure of sight, alas! prevented it, Happily no failure had he to plead in his case.

To these flattering expressions of good-will, dashed with some imputation of slackness, he can only say in return, that with a natural antipathy (increased, if possible,) to dispute, and faculties
more

more upon the wane than a partial friend is willing to suppose, he has here made a feeble effort to comply with the last injunction, probably with the less reluctance, from his being sensible of his near approach to that bourn, beyond which no sound of controversy can ever reach him.

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*To the Younger Part of the Clergy of
the Church of England.*

CHAPTER I.

*Subject—Manner of treating it—Present
Occasion of this Address.*

SECTION I.

Introduction to the Subject.

My respected young Friends,

ALLOW an aged brother to introduce this affectionate Address to you, upon a concern highly interesting to us all, in the usual form, which the temper of the times has not quite antiquated yet, with a text of Scripture:
“*They told you there should be mockers, in the last time, walking after their own un-*

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godly

*godly lusts.** A time there was, it seems, when sobriety of thought, of speech and conduct, was, in all professions, ranks and stations, held requisite to obtain respect. It was foretold by the sacred writers that a deplorable change, in sentiments, discourse and manners, should succeed : a time should come, when increasing insolence and licentiousness would impel men to deride what had always before been most revered.

How far is the prediction, beyond all former ages, fulfilled at this day? Those only are entitled to resolve this question, who have previously acquired just conceptions of the characters, moral and religious, of former periods ; who have fairly scrutinized what is exhibited of them, in the most approved traditions, and authentic records of ancient and modern history ; who have discrimination and candour competent to judge how far the present lamented statements are impartial, and consistent with truth, or exaggerated, and ill-

* Jude, ver. 18.

grounded ;

grounded ; whether the instances alledged of the rapid increase of irreligion and moral depravity in fact exceed their worst extremes, in times of reputed greater purity ; or whether the evils reported to be now most prevalent may not be compensated by a greater proportion of good, either present or in prospect, to which they may be rendered aptly introductory. These are points upon which it becomes us not to pronounce a hasty sentence, determined by the fallible evidence of prejudiced relators. Their various estimates, it is incumbent on the rigorous self-constituted censors of the present times to render themselves qualified with matured reflection, to correct, by comparison, first, with each other, and then with the deliberate result of their own observation and judgment upon the conduct and maxims prevailing in the world at large. To the remarks of such persons, (where haply such may be found) not disgracefully drawn, by party-bias, into railing accusation or flattering panegyric, great deference is due. In proportion as they are grounded upon well examined and established

facts, they will deserve, they must command, our serious and respectful notice.

From the concurrent testimony, then, of the most judicious observers, this woful information is too clearly verified :— That among those, who in all companies affect most to obtrude themselves as leaders of the public taste and sentiments, the ordinary tenor of discourse most currently countenanced, is by a barefaced impiety, now rendered odious and painful to all who retain some degree of moral sense, and sobriety of thought. From these distinguished chieftains of libertinism, upon whose lack of modesty appears to be founded their potent claim to rule the fashion of common conversation, in too many circles especially, which the courtesy of the town is pleased to stile polite, or good company ; from these it is that has been traced the contagion of openly professed infidelity, communicated first to the baser tribes of their fond admirers, and descending rapidly from these to their mimic attendants, and down from thence

to characters of like atrocity in all the lowest ranks of the community.

What shall we suppose to be the chief incitement to a practice manifestly repugnant to reason, decency, and every generous principle in our nature? To what intent are these deriders striving to undermine the foundation of all good morals, and bring religion into discredit? The Apostle plainly points it out. It is that they may quench the internal light, which an offended conscience casts on their known depravity, may deaden the sense of it's unwelcome admonitions: it is that they may *walk* secure from censure, *after their own ungodly lusts*: it is that they may keep their dissolute manners and disgraceful characters in countenance.

S E C.

SECTION II.

Manner of treating the Subject.

VARIOUS have been the attempts of wise and good men to subdue this frenzy of impiety. The most ardent champions of our faith have expressed, in a laudable strain of indignant eloquence, their natural feelings, and just resentment of an insult, as highly injurious to man as affrontive to God. Its assaults have been also repelled, with equal spirit, but more questionable effect, by enforcing the weight of solid arguments, with the pointed shafts of wit, and retorting upon them their own weapons of scorn and ridicule. May we reasonably hope that a calm and serious expostulation will be admitted as the most properly applicable to reclaim a criminal of this enormity? Can it have any considerable efficacy in putting a check to this outrageous licence, which threatens to destroy

stroy our dearest hopes of happiness in this life, and in the life to come?

We must confess it has no claim to be thus gently treated. Nevertheless, permit your present Addresser to assure you, that some reflection upon the experience of a long life, in a great part affording him much opportunity of forming an extensive acquaintance with what the fashion allows these arrogant gentry exclusively to stile *the World*, has convinced him, that the method of treatment recommended has frequently a chance of succeeding with them, to a far better effect than either bitter invective or sarcastic taunt. Whether, as that same *world* is now disposed, his conviction is well founded, or not, it concerns you advisedly to consider. That point he wishes to submit to your mature judgment upon trial, ye ingenuous youths, in whom the grace of modesty, supported by the dignity of a perfectly fair and decent character, with natural talents, properly improved, will confer an acceptable power of mild persuasion, will always insure a degree of attention and respect, even

from the libertine, which he is seldom inclined to pay to persons, whose superiority over him is merely that of authority, rank, or affluence. It is from those alone amongst you who are so happy as to answer this description, from those especially, who have just entered upon the pastoral office, that he flatters himself he may chance to obtain some notice of the following slight suggestions, which you will not utterly reject as improperly obtruded by one in the same low station with yourselves.

SECTION III.

Present Occasion of this Address.

THE salutary end they humbly mean to serve, you must allow to be peculiarly interesting to us at this juncture, when a general alarm is industriously spread, that all sense of religion is utterly extinguished upon the neighbouring continent, and exhibits, even in these, it's less culpable and more favoured abodes, too visible symptoms of it's losing speedily all it's
vital

vital energy. Is this alarm a just one? How shall we resolve this query without offence? Let us be content to say, we hope, we are inclined to believe, it is unreasonably aggravated, and that, upon better information, and cooler reflection, it will appear, our startled apprehensions have hurried us into conclusions, which our christian principles should have taught us to disprove. Let us recollect who it is that governs the world, and that his glorious attributes are never more conspicuously displayed, than when from transient evil he educes permanent good.

As to the present distracted state of wretched France *, what impending destructive consequences it's defiance of the vengeance of heaven, or the guilt of it's affrighted neighbours, appears to be bringing down upon them, baffles all

" Quantis sit cladibus urbi constatura fides superum."*

LUCAN.

It was manifestly Atheism that preceded and brought on the overthrow of the corrupt republic and liberty of Rome, as it has of late that of the despicable misgovernment of an enfeebled monarchy in France.

"Ruin behind it stalk'd, and empty Desolation."

COWLEY.

CON-

conjecture. The disastrous forms of Anarchy, rising from the ruins of Despotism, with Infidelity trampling on the neck of her justly detested parent, Superstition *, are objects of our present horror and amazement; but must not drive us into despair of seeing them fade suddenly away, like the phantasms of a feverish dream. These most dreaded of all tyrants will have their destined career and termination of misrule (no distant one) assigned them by that God, whose sovereign authority they affect still to deride, in full security that “† *their covenant with death shall not be disannulled, their agreement with hell shall stand, and that when the overwhelming plague shall pass through them, they shall not be trodden down. ‡ Their refuge they have made in falsehood; and under deceit they have thought to lie concealed.*” Distraction, extreme confusion, and affliction, after a deceitful and transient flow of brilliant success will, in the hand of the Lord, be the instruments ordained to restore them to peaceable, righteous,

* See their genealogy accurately traced in Plutarch, *περί Δεισιδαιμονίας.*

† Isa. xxviii. 18.

‡ Ib. 15.

and

and regular government. A juster estimate will, through these, be inculcated, by woful experience, of the slender confidence they should repose, for protection from *wrongs*, for an establishment of the *rights of men*, dependant on the rash and arbitrary decrees of wretches who can affront the sovereignty of their Universal Parent, to whom they owe their being, with all it's enjoyments, which they so ungratefully abuse. A recovered sense of their Creator's presence, of their responsibility to him, and his avenging justice for their multiplied iniquities, will strike resistless evidence into their souls, that "** verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.*"

All their adoration is now paid to the energy of physical, or second causes, exclusive, or in open defiance, of the Supreme First Cause. Will the all-wise Preserver of the Universe endure his benign control of the deleterious consequences necessarily resulting from this malignant confederacy against him, to be

* Psalm lviii. 11.

long suspended? Be assured it is even now in a due course of preparation to enforce a general conviction that the season of his forbearance has its appointed limit. We dare not yet pronounce that we can behold it clearly marked. But in this we may safely trust, that a period to his long-suffering of their horrid enormities will be then determined; the accumulated vengeance, which they are dragging down on their devoted heads, will then infallibly take effect, when they shall have accomplished his salutary purpose, of rendering them his “* servile ministers” of penal infliction upon the sins of other nations, as well as of their own. This we very well know, that “† *He is a God who is not willing that any should finally perish, but that all should come to repentance:*” that it is directly contradictory to his attribute of justice, no less than that of mercy, (however our theological systems may clash with this eternal truth), that he should suffer the existence of any of his creatures to be, upon the whole, a curse, and not the occasion, or

* Shakespear. † 2 Pet. iii. 9.

subject,

subject, of some preponderant general blessing, nay, that such will universally be the event of all present evil, even to themselves.

Let us pray then, with charity and a true faith, “* *that He will turn again and have compassion,*” even upon them, “*that He will subdue their iniquities, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*” In the mean time, let us rest assured his mercy will soon shine forth, from the direst extremity of their distress; as in the regular operations of his handmaid Nature, ever punctually obedient to his gracious laws, much apparent and partial evil is, by his express direction, rendered subservient to some real over-balance of absolute and general good. Nevertheless, let us not presume too positively in this, or in any present or particular case, that the immediate interposition of a Divine Superintendant either has been, is, or ever will be, likely to take effect, in exact conformity to our expectation. How fightless, alas! how frequently miscon-

* Micah vii. 19.

ceiving,

ceiving, is the judgment of the wisest of mortals, of what is most expedient, in matters of such high concern! How inconsiderate, in this respect, how derogatory to the meek and humble spirit of the gospel are the rash assumptions of many a ranting christian orator!

Though the laws by which the Providence of God governs the movements of the natural world, are, in a certain degree, rendered perceptible to our faculties, are determinate and regular, as well as general, it is but little we can investigate thoroughly, can really know; however much we boast, we dream of knowing. But of his moral government the laws are infinitely more inscrutable, it's connections and dependencies more intricate and remote from our observation. Revelation alone points out and opens to the eyes of faith, a future completion of his moral plan, in another state of existence, to which all the promiscuous events of the present state bear a constant reference. We here most feelingly experience that a plentiful diffusion of
good

good is dashed with a great admixture of evil. In our inadequate estimation, the latter is too often apparently, with regard to individuals, though erroneously, in respect to the whole human race, imagined to outweigh the former.

This perplexing phenomenon, so painfully enforced upon our anxious reflection, we impatiently wish, we piously pray, that we may see compensated by superior good. We declare our confident assurance that we shall, one day, clearly recognize, that we do, even now, with the telescopic aid of christian hope, actually behold the promises of a righteous God completely realized. From wisdom not celestial, the accomplishment of these our wishes, prayers, assurances, must remain, in proportionate degrees, still unrevealed. In the intermediate interval, how are our weak and wavering minds affected? Now presumptuous, then desponding, still dissatisfied, we anticipate the decrees of Heaven in our favour, we invoke it's vengeance on the objects of our resentment. How discordant to our expectations are the scenes
which

which it presents to our view in real life ! We mistrust it's impartiality, we impeach it's wisdom, we arraign it's justice. This surely is not the language of thy children, O " Eternal * *Father of Lights, from whom every good, and every perfect gift cometh down, without variableness, or shadow of turning.*" Resigned, and with unshaken trust ever looking up to Thee, in their afflictions their humble voice they never vary. " † *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*"

But should we for a moment be unmindful that the present increasing infolence of infidelity, and the lamented low estate of religion, are alike under the secret control of his Providence; should we be tempted to repine at his delay in bringing order out of confusion, let us listen, first, to the hasty strain of diffidence and complaint uttered by the royal Psalmist, and then to his sudden correction of it, by returning piety and resignation. " ‡ *I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the un-*

* James i. 17. † 1 Sam. iii. 18. ‡ Ps. lxxxiii.

godly in such prosperity ; and I said : Then have I cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency : for all the day long have I been plagued ; and chastened every morning. When I thought to understand this, it was too painful for me. So foolish was I, and ignorant, even as a beast before thee : until I went into the sanctuary of God ; then understood I the end of these men : namely, how thou dost set them in slippery places, castest them down, and destroyest them. O how suddenly do they come to a fearful end, and vanish even as a dream, when one awaketh." Thus leaving all judgment to him, who alone judgeth righteously, you hear the late repining murmurer, even in the same breath, exclaim, with a fervor of devotion : "*I abide continually by thee : thou holdest me by my right hand, and shalt receive me into glory.*" Let it not be said, my pious and virtuous young friends, (for it is to you alone that I am speaking), that a Jewish king, of morals far from irreproachable, was inspirited with a firmer, a more consistent faith and trust in God's word, than an English Protestant Clergyman.

The troublous aspect of religious, moral and political concerns, which of late years has been presented to your painful reflection, in the most enlightened regions of this lower world, has indeed been full of terrors, has exhibited effects, which threaten, for a space, to prove still hostile to the dearest interests of humanity in general. Yet particularly, in regard to that nation itself, which we are taught to consider as utterly destitute of all good principle, as the very centre of infidelity and profligacy, as irrecoverably given up to "strife, confusion, and every evil work," it behoves you to be better advised than to renounce all hope of better things, even for them. We have certain information, that the congregations of the *Theophilanthropes* *, lately formed in Paris, are already surprizingly multiplied. In temples consecrated to the Father of the Universe, adoration is paid at stated intervals, with prayer, thanksgiving, and hymns of praise. Lectures theological, as well as moral, are constantly delivered at these assemblies;

* In 1797.

and

and the love of God, their kindred, their country, of all mankind, is enforced, not from temporal motives alone, but from those also of an eternal concern. In a nation ever frivolous, most opinative, and at once incorrigibly versatile, we are not surprized to find a mode of worship, raised upon the wreck of all religious establishments, and professing the most perfect simplicity, to be yet abounding, at every assembly, with various inconsistencies, and disfigured by puerilities, manifestly tending to cherish, in the * *Badauds amateurs du spectacle*, a demand for a succession of new-fangled superstitious rites, as ridiculous as those they have abolished.

It is from Christianity they derive all that is valuable in their system, while they ungratefully spurn it's divine sanctions. Never doubt their recurring insensibly to embrace anew these rejected sanctions, as the best security for their firm establishment, without wavering in the belief of the existence of the superintending Pro-

* *Cockneys, fond of shews*, we say in English.

vidence of God, of an ever-present Witness and Judge, to whom we are accountable for all our thoughts, and words and actions. The collision of jarring tenets, in their false philosophy, will itself strike forth light, will be their conductor to a conviction of the invaluable benefit, the extreme exigency of a gospel from heaven, to inculcate the doctrine of the immortality of the human soul, its subjection, in this state of discipline, to various degrees of good and evil, natural and moral, and to consequent rewards and punishments, to be regularly dispensed, in a better life to come, after a short probation here. On these points, we are told, they reason, with an entire freedom from control, or interference of the civil power. Do they reason, indeed? Shame on them if they persist in reasoning without inquiring also. If their eyes are actually open, and eager in the search of truth, depend upon it they will not long be obstinately bent on vacancy. After many a desperate struggle, and relapse into groundless doubts, will they not experience that no security is left for unblest feet on their incongruous
and

and contradictory systems, upon which, (however they may obtain, by turns, a kind of negative assent, or indistinct applause), no solid understanding has ever yet found rest?

In attempting to vindicate the unchangeable perfections, which they, by fits, attribute, "** TO THE UNKNOWN GOD,*" the object of their present worship, deplorably intermitted, though now apparently renewed, it is not credible they should long fail to discern the urgent necessity of a recourse to the most ancient and authentic records of the dispensations of God to man. Of a creature formed after the image of the Deity, good, amiable and holy, "how lost, to death devote †," what account will their unassisted Reason pretend to give? When their experienced inability to resolve this difficult question shall have led them, probably for the first time, seriously to cast an attentive eye upon those sacred scriptures, how will they be astonished to find, that what the wilful

• Acts xvii. 23.

† Milton.

blindness

blindness of their unbelieving sophists, what the perverse ingenuity, or frantic arrogance of enthusiasts have studiously rendered dark, perplexed, and comfortless, has, by all these, been “* *wrested unto their own destruction,*” by a defect of sound learning, and of all fixed principles. What they have of late professed to adopt, as their only solid and admissible tenets, they must wish to see more generally received. Of this they can have no surer prospect, than by a direct appeal, for a certain test of their truth, to their conformity to the revealed word of God. One advantage they will then derive from the claim they will assume of absolute independence, and disregard of the control of human authority, in their mode of understanding and expounding it. This must lead to an impartial examination of that holy word; and that will assuredly disclose to them a full discovery and conviction, that all which appertains to their guidance, in the pursuit of their temporal and eternal interests, is there so clearly discernible, “† *that he may run that*

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

† Habbakuk ii. 2.

readeth it." To the defence and permanent establishment of these salutary truths, they will become sensible of what great moment are the sanctions of the gospel of Christ: they will acknowledge them at last, as being alone perfectly adequate to the office of becoming our infallible instructors how to walk, with fear and hope, as in the presence of God, as joyfully and thankfully resigned to the gracious Providence of him, who has promised, and alone is always able, to overcome evil with good.

Let us hope, ere long, to recognize, in the chastized and amended state, even of the most distracted region of mad profaneness and misrule, the all-controlling hand of that unerring Providence, directing it's benign, though dreadful instruments to speed and establish genuine religion and legal government. May it's national constitution, long fruitful of calamities and crimes, unheard of hitherto in the history of mankind, after it shall have completed it's appointed series of *reforms*, (or changes for the worse,) be permitted at length to settle in a state of
 permanent

permanent order and tranquillity. May it experience, with a grateful awe, the wisdom of that merciful dispensation, which has purified it's infected atmosphere, by a succession of dreadful hurricanes. Of the wise infliction of these penal convulsions, the Almighty Arbiter of the destiny of nations is alone the judge. When at length, by salutary correction, thus regenerated, may it cease to embroil the surrounding states with perpetual discord, but become sincerely what it perfidiously professed to be, the cement of their lasting harmony. It may then probably aspire to approach, in spirit and in substance, if not in form, to a resemblance of what has been found conducive to the glory of the most perfect plans of government that ever yet existed upon earth, especially of our own, as far as it is subservient to the general good of the community, and it's moral and religious improvement.

This humane and devout wish for their future welfare, you may certainly form, in perfect consistency with the most ardent zeal for the real interests of Britain.

tain. Enlightened with the sound philosophy of a truly christian spirit, you will heartily condemn the narrowness of the vulgar notion, that any nation upon earth can be our natural enemy. Is it not astonishing to hear that grossest of all political delusions countenanced by the authority of names held up to popular admiration? It is an impious insult to the God of nature. His general law of mutual attractions, so regularly manifested in the material world, is not indeed so constantly discernible in the moral and political, as the evangelical prophet assures us it will be, when the kingdom of Christ, * *the Prince of Peace*, shall be fully established, "*of the increase of whose government and peace there shall then be no end.*" But this, by our modern race of mock philosophers is derided as a vision, is blasphemed as folly. "They say to Distraction, thou shalt be our wisdom, to Repulsion, thou shalt guide our spirit." How shall the wisest plan that can be proposed for a lasting peace ever recommend itself, or it's practicability

* Isaiah ix. 6, 7.

cease to be deemed ridiculous by these devoted sons of turbulence and ceaseless discord? How has many a benevolent theorist sighed in secret, when compelled to discern the cause, why of all the fine-spun projects for a perpetual peace, which have soothed his fancy for a while, or inflamed his baffled wishes, not one has yet proved adequate to the accomplishment of so desirable a purpose? Not one, from that presented seventy years ago, by the mild admirer of monarchy, the Abbé St. Pierre, to Lewis the Fifteenth, then the well-beloved despot of France, to that, still less auspiciously inscribed by the stern republican, Professor Kant, to Frederic the Third, the late unbeloved despot of Prussia; not one has failed to exhibit, at it's birth, some evident token of it's speedy dissolution. Of the former " * delirious dreams of a worthy man," the most fatal symptom was, that their mode of producing the proposed effect in preventing the destructive enterprises of sovereigns against each other, and the civil wars and conspiracies

* *Reveries d'un honnête homme*, so titled by Montesquieu.

among their subjects, would have given perpetuity to all established abuses, and the *coup de grace* to civil liberty. With respect to the other project, published last * year, many generations will probably pass away, before the most specious of the preliminary articles it lays down will be deemed admissible by the governors of any one nation upon earth. When your faith in the christian revelation inclines you to trust, that a merciful Providence has ordained that a permanent and universal peace shall one day actually take place, by a new order of things, as yet unexplored, keep this for ever in mind, that a general conformity alone to the pure doctrines, with an entire subjection to the precepts of the gospel, are sufficient to accomplish it.

In the mean time we must confess, that not all the sanguine philanthropy of Montesquieu's benevolent dreamer, not all the profound sagacity of the abstruse philosopher of Konigsberg could be competent to discover, in the present com-

* In 1797.

bination of events, a likely prospect of it's speedy establishment. In what light the successive potentates of several denominations, and their counsellors, whom the scythe of time has swept away, or yet may spare, in this expiring century, will be regarded by the happy inhabitants of the * renovated earth, it is not for an obscure cottager, in a petty hamlet †, to risque a vain conjecture. In one point, however, he hopes he may be permitted, without offence, to express his concurrence of sentiment with a liberal and well-informed political speculatist, less noticed by the public than he appears to merit ;
 “ ‡ *The sovereigns, as far as they are in-*

* When “ *nova progenies cælo demittitur alto.*”

VIRGIL.

† Whence, “ *like a shepherd gazing from his hut,*

Eager Ambition's fiery chase he sees

Burst law's enclosure, leap the mounds of right,

Pursuing and pursued, each other's prey,

As wolves for rapine, as the fox for wiles ;

Till Death, the mighty hunter, earths them all.”

YOUNG.

‡ See *A Memorial humbly addressed to the Sovereigns of Europe, &c.* Preface, p. 4, printed for Almond, Piccadilly.

formed,

formed, and are in circumstances to exert themselves, have the interest and prosperity of their subjects, the welfare and happiness of mankind, more at heart than it ever enters into the hearts of their ministers to conceive."

Yet of the latter also he candidly finds many, and much to approve. At the head of the first list, he sets the great Henry of France. He adds, "*One has heard of a Sully, a Fleury, a Clarendon, a Somers, a De-Witt, a ****; and, for the common good of mankind one would hope that such men, in all countries, (where they can act), may never be wanting to continue this other list.*" Let us hope his applauded scheme for a general and permanent pacification, and extinguishing the common incentive to perpetual contests among rival nations, by rendering an entire and universal freedom of commerce their firm bond of mutual interests, will, at the approach of a much wished for season, be duly attended to by all parties.

As for you, ye loyal and trusty servants of a sovereign, whose kingdom is not of this world, who came down to it, to exalt your views to a better, know it becomes

becomes you peculiarly, amid the tumult of political jars, which a general misunderstanding, fomented by treacherous or venal state-impostors, has kindled amongst all ranks of our countrymen, still to preserve your equanimity. Be emulous, however unfashionable it may be deemed, of being distinguished for that independency of spirit, once appropriated to our generous and manly national character, now seldom discernible, on either side, amongst our modern smatterers in controversy, civil or ecclesiastical. Neither adoring nor insulting your earthly rulers, be ready with honour and consistency, to defend their conduct and reputation, when they are rudely attacked, but so far only as you are convinced the attack is actually unjustifiable. Your adviser has been ever disposed, perhaps from temper and habit, to cherish a persuasion, that the measures most decried by our past historians, or current pamphleteers, as adopted by princes in general, or recommended by their prime confidants, have proceeded incomparably less from criminal intentions, than the virulence of faction has imputed to them.

Mistaken

Mistaken mortals! upon a close inspection of their true characters, and what they call their principles, though we should lower the tone of extreme panegyric, we might commonly see cause to soften the severity of condemnation. The interest of their masters, the safety and welfare of their fellow-subjects, as far as they understood them, will generally appear to have guided their counsels. These, indeed, though honestly, they have sometimes fatally served, as the courteous bear, improvidently chosen by a bewildered traveller, to conduct him through a pathless forest, who, watching his slumbers, killed him with kindness, and a sharp flint, thrown with zeal and dexterity, to drive away a gnat from his forehead. This candid opinion you will make it a general rule to maintain, as well of the opposers, as of the supporters of public measures, against whom, in other respects, you have nothing reproachable to alledge, if you possess that elevation and impartiality of spirit, without which the character of a clergyman shamefully derogates from its proper dignity. Disclaiming alike

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an implicit attachment to a whig, a tory, a popular or court faction, you will form the fairest estimate of men, by a comparison of their conduct with the principles they profess.

There is one obvious oversight, into which we are continually liable to fall, in the judgments we pass upon the very best constituted establishment upon earth, civil and ecclesiastical, and such we are verily persuaded our own to be. We expect, or seem to expect, not in the establishments themselves alone, but in the persons and conduct of those who govern them, actual infallibility, we peremptorily demand absolute perfection. You will not step out of your province, as Christian preachers, when you shall expose the presumption, the folly of these expectations; nor shall I be justly accused by a peevish critic, of departing from the purpose of this Address, in exhorting you to a cheerful discharge of this pleasing part of your duty, as loyal subjects of the Prince of Peace. Tell us then that the Almighty Author of our existence foresaw that this required excellence,

lence, exempt from all defect, was incompatible with this, it's infant and transitory period of probation and discipline. Bid us turn our eyes inwardly upon ourselves, and look into our own disordered state, our mental blindness, our wayward passions, our moral imperfections. And is it in such a weak, inconsiderate, and ignorant creature as man; (and our rulers are but men, however they may affect to appear something more), is it in the sagest measures, ordinances or statutes of man, that we are to seek, are impatiently to require, or which is more foolish still, are stupidly boastful of discovering unerring wisdom?

You will silently contrast the solemn vaunts of undeviating rectitude of conduct, so frequent in the mouths of some conspicuous leaders of our party-contests, both in and out of place. If in adverting to the several classes by turns, you shall see the champions for a farther enlargement of our liberties, possessed of power, and honestly approving themselves the promoters of due limitations to their own authority : if you shall note, with wonder due, the late adorers of ex-

tended royal prerogative, while basking in it's sunshine, to be continuing still as zealous sticklers for passive obedience and non-resistance to it, when driven with meek resignation, to the shade, you may credit as you list, the assumptions of both or either. When, on the one hand, you shall be convinced that the strenuous advocates for a reform of notorious abuses which may have crept into the administrations of public concerns, either in church or state, are men of approved and perfect probity, a liberal temper, and deliberate judgment, steady opposers of every measure, which, instead of order, would lead to confusion, instead of improving our excellent constitution, would endanger it's stability, you will not, in echo to a court sycophant, accuse them of seditious purposes, you will be rather apt to say ; " * fear them not, Cæsar, they're not dangerous."

When, on the other hand, those who, in a steadier tone, condemn all present contention for innovation, and, from persuasion of real danger, loudly sound an alarm for the

• Shakespeare.

safety

safety of the ancient props of civil government, shall shew an equal earnestness to give fresh spirit to every principle that is most conducive to public virtue and happiness, in our old establishments; no longer then will candour or justice require you to withdraw your esteem or confidence entirely from the keenest partizans of either side. You will probably see occasion to compassionate the frailty of human nature, whether exhibited in the character of a Reformist or Alarmist, that will not admit their honest minds to be comprehensive and liberal, uniform and consistent. But you will readily pronounce the superlative preference of both these warm and sometimes erring disputants, over two despicable characters, which, at all times, have been familiar to common observation in this country. In one tribe ranks the man, whose little soul is not destitute of a capacity for reflection, but who, holding all public spirit in derision, implicitly applauds and justifies every proceeding and sentiment of the patron who is disposed to favour his private interests. Of his opposite, in the other tribe, com-

mon sense declares there can hardly be two opinions ; of the man whose life is deeply stained with vice and impiety, yet who sets himself up as a vehement stickler for a public, without one serious purpose of a private reform.

In a word, keeping ever at a distance from all extremes, that tend either to perpetuate wrongs, or to create confusion, let us rest in hope that due warning will be taken from the horrors consequent upon the French Revolution, to provide that a milder destiny may attend this less guilty, and hitherto less distracted, country. Let us rely upon the solid structure of our national constitution in church and state, pre-eminent, upon the whole, in all substantial excellence, to any, the most applauded form of government upon earth*, liable, in it's administration, to such abuses only as a temperate reform can easily redress, without convulsive remedies. It's experienced blessings have prevented, and will, we trust, continue to prevent, the epidemical phrenzy of absolute democracy, or irreligion

* "Ne in summa pericula mittat
Venturi timor ipse mali."

LUCAN.
wrought

wrought into system, from inflaming the brains of any justly dreaded numbers amongst us. Whilst the terrifying swarm of evils innumerable, arisen from both, is hovering just before our eyes, it will of course restrain the ardour of the boldest innovator from disturbing, with immediate or lasting mischief, our internal tranquillity. But as the true patriot looks down, with a like disdain, upon the unprincipled tool of power, and the dupe or knave of faction, so the true religionist is alike secure from the trammels of bigotry, and the licence of infidelity. It behoves them both not to suffer their attachment to established modes, either civil or ecclesiastical, which, upon the most deliberate consideration, they esteem highly commendable, and sincerely love, to beguile them into principles inconsistent with British liberty, and genuine Protestantism.

Persuaded as we are, that an immense majority, nine-tenths at least, of our countrymen, are zealously desirous to maintain our establishments unimpaired, what opinion shall we form of the threats or terrors, raised from reports, often apparently

parently exaggerated, and as often frittered away in a breath, by the chiefs or ringleaders of either party; yet when fairly confuted and exploded, stupidly echoed still by their simple followers? To declaim, with indiscriminate censure upon the supposed increasing moral depravity and irreligion of this or that country, from the atrocious practices, or extravagant speeches of some of it's inhabitants in fits of frenzy, is as shocking to common sense, as to justice or candour. Will a mind, endued with a reasonable portion of either of these qualities, approve of that affected tone of despondency in vogue among persons of a certain description, who think themselves interested in alarming the public with the danger of an universal wreck of all sound, political, moral, and religious principles? Christianity, they declare, and with it "** the mercy of our God is clean gone for ever.*" And is "*his promise*" then utterly "*come to an end for evermore ?*" Rather let the man, who expostulates thus rashly with Heaven, be re-

* Psalm lxxvii.

mind of David's judicious self-rebuke, and be taught to cry; "*It is mine own infirmity: but I will remember the years of thy right-hand, O thou Most Highest: thou with thine arm, we know, hast of old redeemed thy people.*" Thy dispensations, "*whose path is in the sea, and whose footsteps are not known,*" we presume not to scan. But we trust thou mayest yet educe, from these convulsive shocks, that make the whole earth tremble, that menace universal destruction, a brighter display of thy judgments first, and then of thy mercy, to a deluded and sinful nation.

In contemplating these dire objects of our present horror, allow me to direct your attention to the glowing and sublime, yet, peculiarly appropriate sentiments, which they have raised in the breast of a * devout and exemplary senator, with whom it is no wonder the colder-hearted Christians, in the higher classes, whom he addresses, should bear

* See Mr. Wilberforce's Practical View of the present religious Systems contrasted with real Christianity. P. 460.

little or no sympathy. "Never were there times which inculcated more forcibly, than those in which we live, the wisdom of seeking a happiness beyond the reach of human vicissitudes. What striking lessons have we had of the precarious tenure of all sublunary possessions ! Wealth, and power, and prosperity, how peculiarly transitory and uncertain ! But Religion dispenses her choicest cordials in the seasons of exigence, in poverty, in exile, in sickness, and in death. The essential superiority of that support, which is derived from religion, is less felt amid the splendor of rank and fortune. But when these are swept away by the rough blasts of adversity, the true Christian stands, like the glory of the forest, erect and vigorous ; stripped indeed of his summer foliage, but more than ever discovering to the observing eye the solid strength of his substantial texture." From the melancholy point of view, in which the supposed rapid decline of religion and morality in Britain presents itself to this amiable and truly excellent man ; he beholds it necessarily attended with a black train

of national distresses. It is some comfort still that he entertains solid hopes for the future well-being of his country. "They depend not so much, as he declares", on our fleets and armies, the wisdom of our rulers, or the spirit of her people, as on the persuasion that she contains *many*, who in a degenerate age, love and obey the gospel of Christ." In cherishing the like cheering hopes, you will not, I trust, agree with him, in excluding from the number of real Christians "the most amiable, decent, useful, and respectable members of the community;" against whom he is understood expressly to pronounce a dreadful sentence, that "they are in a state of desperate alienation from God." Listen to the apparent ground for this dire anathema. They cannot in their hearts assent to the inexplicable tenets of a sect, of which Mr. Wilberforce is the declared patron.

Within a less contracted pale, ye rational and not less sincerely firm adhe-

rents to the true church of Christ, you will be persuaded charitably to include a far greater multitude than the great apostle of that sect, Mr. John Wesley, who in a weary search from one end of the kingdom to the other, protests he could find but two or three. How could a man of his understanding imagine that every one, who with the purest affection studies, and professes a devout respect for the word of God, must of course be under a necessity of agreeing with him, in his method of expounding it? What shall we think of his modesty who could declare he found himself almost the only Englishman privileged to embrace Christianity with a perfect exemption from default or misconstruction? How must we regret the display of a similar presumption in his more candid friend, Mr. Wilberforce, who appears to have imbibed, in other respects, so much of the true spirit of the gospel? It is scarce conceivable, that such a man should not be sensible of his own share of human imperfections, and how adverse it is to the meek spirit of a Christian, thus "*to judge,*
and

*and set at nought **" so many thousands to one of his brethren.

The same declamatory and indiscriminate complaints of a general apostacy from the orthodox faith, have been constantly but too familiar among persons of a certain temper and portion of conceit, very good men in other respects, throughout all the regions of Christendom, time out mind. But far more alarming are the sounds of lamentation and dismay, of late gone forth. An increasing scorn of natural, not less than of revealed religion, is declared to be now prevalent, a disposition to renounce all fixed and salutary principles, to dissolve all bonds of social union, an universal defection from loyalty to all orderly government, a disdain of the authority of all laws, divine as well as human. It is well recollected by many of my coevals, to what a degree these indefinite accusations were frequent, at a period remote from the present, in days when "hard words, jealousies and fears," abounded no less than at this day, with

* Rom. xiv. 10.

alarms as just of danger, as well from without as from within. These excessive clamours of a general and spreading contagion of all manner of depravity, men of calmer sense and happier connections, commonly turned off then, as they do now, by confessing, with a smile, their unwillingness to assent to the propriety of a woful assertion, against which it was their good fortune to know many a laudable exception. It is more than probable, that if blessed with the like opportunities of selecting and conversing with worthy persons, these intemperate complainants would be somewhat less out of heart, or at least more cautious of launching out into these peevish lamentations.

Let your positive estimate of the extent of guilt, the real proportion of degeneracy in the character of the times, be the result of impartial information, obtained by diligent inquiry, and confirmed by your own observation and experience, before you take upon you the office of a rigid censor. No, not even upon them all conjointly ought you to rely too confidently, before you shall have brought

brought them to the test of your sedate, mature, and repeated reflection, and comparison with the complexion and temperature of other times. This will preserve the balance of your judgment even. It will not then be swayed by the sottiſh or interested invectives of the vile agents of the contending parties. You will hold these railing accusations equally contemptible, in the prime promoters, or the baser tools of either faction, that of the court, or that of the populace. Suspend your belief of every report you receive, either from those who are seeking to batten in the smiles of a sovereign, or from those who prowl for public favour in the darker haunts of the friends of anarchy and confusion. You will deliberately weigh what degree of credit is due to the pretended consternation, and loud reproaches, which you hear echoed from their adverse quarters, alike replete with apprehended ruin to the nation.

On the one hand, your ears are assailed with the sullen murmurs of malecontents, against the proud servility of men in place, their shameless venality and corruption,
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their oppression, extravagance and rapacity, and their inconsiderate and disastrous measures, precipitately taken from passions, disgraceful to the heart of man, but admitted, by a strange prosopopœia, members alike of the public and of the privy council. On the other hand, you are kept amidst too many reasonable and just alarms, in perpetual terror from groundless ones, raised by rumours of dark plots carried on by a small, an almost invisible band of desperate renegades and traitors, who are contriving all iniquitous means of supplanting the men of elevated station and power; who disguise their disloyal anarchical principles under a zeal for a reform, or innovation, perilous to the state, and ruinous to the church, its articles, canons, liturgy and discipline, an attempt which, in the account of those whose unvaried watchword is *All is well*, is a manifest conspiracy to overturn our happy constitution, and yield the property of all the worthy, affluent and loyal, a prey to a worthless rabble. Generously indignant at the false assertions, futile declamations, and illusive arguments of the Outs and Ins,

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the maudlin Tories and the desponding Whigs, the bigots or enthusiasts ; moving yourselves in a sphere exalted high above these battling reptiles, learn to speak more favourably of both, than they affect to speak, and pretend to think of each other.

Let each one turn his eyes inwardly on his own heart, and be sensibly convinced of what high importance it is to his peace and comfort, whether he shall find it disposed to cherish a gloomy and querulous, or a serene and placid spirit. With a mind thus established in a more equitable and impartial temper, you will then be inclined to speak less uncandidly even of this *untoward, rebellious, faithless* and *perverse* generation. It is not from the men of most comprehensive understanding or enlarged benevolence that you will commonly hear such complaints. They will tell you it is their opinion, founded upon some reflection, that in no former age has this nation been graced with a greater number of honourable and worthy characters, in all conditions, in
private

private and in public life, in the middle ranks indeed most generally. These are naturally, and for obvious reasons, most likely to occur to the observation of those, who in love themselves with rational piety, uniform probity, and beneficence without ostentation, delight in seeking, knowing and associating with persons of the like excellent dispositions.

Nevertheless, no less true it is that their still small voice is too often drowned by the din of persons of a quite opposite character. The Libertine, and petulant Scornor will be ever obtruding themselves upon your notice, in all mixed companies, in the garb of elegant rulers of the fashion, of polite arbiters of the taste of the public, who treat with indignity the doctrines and precepts of all religion, natural and revealed, and with the most pointed sneers, the notions of a Divine Providence, and of a future state after death. The arrogant pretences of these pests of society to superior wit and reason it is easy to confute and expose, but very difficult to silence. Vainly boastful, as they

they may often be of their elevated rank, the countenance and applause they meet among fools thus gifted, the sole possession of the art of sçavoir vivre, of all the arcana of the new philosophy, of a masterly compass of thinking, exhibited only in an unlimited freedom of speaking ; and, to crown all, the increasing numbers and strength of their flourishing sect ; they are absurdly countenanced, in their last presumptuous vaunt especially, by the unfounded rants, and the excessive alarms of many an ignorant, or misjudging zealot.

However different, after all, our judgments may be in estimating the growth and extent of this great mischief, you must of course be liable to witness much more of it, than one who, for many years, has lived a happy recluse from *their world*. It is therefore highly incumbent upon you to keep a careful and constant watch against the progress of an evil so injurious to the honour of God, and the best interests of man. With great consistency, you may be punctual in performing this duty, without ceasing to cherish this

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confident and cordial persuasion: that notwithstanding the most menacing aspect of the moral world, the most barefaced avowal of pernicious principles, we may still be certain that the over-ruling power of a just God will set bounds to their exorbitance, will render even these objects of our complaint and trouble subservient to the interests of true religion and virtue.

Of this persuasion, what are the natural effects upon a well-formed mind? We are well assured that the true church of Christ, the mansion founded upon the rock everlasting, against which the rage of it's external, or the perfidy of it's internal foes shall not prevail, must of necessity remain firm for ever. Shall this assurance lull our faculties in torpid inactivity? Instead of quickening shall it slacken our endeavours in a cause we are engaged to vindicate, with a certainty of triumph? Let it rather inspirit us with a stronger and more constant motive to maintain a resolute opposition to the malice and insolence of these enemies of our holy faith. He is but weakly grounded in that faith, who can admit the slightest

slightest apprehension that the concerns of the true religion can possibly be forsaken by the God of truth. Let us then betray no more discouraging doubts and fears, but be confident that our Divine Teacher's word shall stand established in full force, " * when heaven and earth shall pass away." In contending with the adversaries of religion and truth, a security more permanent than earth, or heaven itself, is here presented us, of our final success. To us belong not the time, the manner of it's perfect accomplishment. These are the concern of Providence.

* Mark xiii. 31.

CHAPTER II.

Defection from true Religion.

SECTION I.

Respect first paid to it.

WHEN the religion of Christ was first displayed in it's genuine purity, it commanded the most earnest and serious regard of all, who impartially beheld it's blessed effects in the conduct of it's primitive professors. The mockery of infidels was then abashed, by the illustrious examples it thus exhibited, of consistent worth. Of this the striking evidence has descended even to our days, with such invincible force, that we have lately, as indeed repeatedly of old, heard the keenest adversaries to the idea of it's miraculous

lous propagation, a Bolingbroke, a Voltaire, a Gibbon, urge this exemplary conduct, as the obvious, if not the only cause of an effect, which appears no longer wonderful, or to require the aid of supernatural interposition. Such was of old; nay, such has been, in proportionate degrees, through all succeeding generations, to the present time, and such will always continue to be the blessed, the *providential effect* of such unfeigned and uniform sanctity of manners.

The corn springs up, the roses bloom, the fruits, the animals, nay, the rational and moral faculties of man, advance to maturity, by the decree, the care, the foresight of a Divine Superintendant. Yet all this, we say, falls out in the ordinary course of nature. We do not indeed like the superficial and conceited disparagers of natural as well as revealed religion, consider these wonderful effects the less as the immediate operations of a supremely intelligent Providence, on account of their constant regularity. So in the establishment of a religion, adapted to regulate the conduct, as well as the

faith of it's professors, it was most reasonable to expect the same course of nature, the same regularity of moral effect, become in it's turn a secondary cause, should be ordained most powerfully to co-operate with the miraculous and extraordinary means, decreed to take place, for the same gracious purpose. Accordingly such were the unblemished honours of the primitive church; such the glory of the resistless beauty of holiness, confirmed by the reluctant admiration, the express acknowledgments of it's most cruel persecutors.

SECTION II.

Early Defection from it.

WHEN in after times, men walking after their own ungodly lusts, had yet the impudence to profess themselves Christians, though degenerated from the respectable graces of humility, and purity of manners, disgraced by the despicable vices of ambition, pride and avarice, and defiled

filed with every impure and disorderly
 passion; the veneration due to religion,
 and generally paid to it, when displayed
 in it's genuine beauty, would cease of
 course, as the apostles Peter, Paul, and
 Jude foretold. To the epithets not un-
 suitably appropriated here, of respectable
 to the first of christian graces, humility,
 and of despicable to the most unchristian
 vice, inordinate ambition, your attention,
 as appointed preachers of the gospel of
 Christ, is particularly requested. When
 you have profoundly meditated upon
 what it is that constitutes the essence of
 these opposite qualities: when you have
 taken a comprehensive survey, accom-
 panied with some serious reflection, of the
 contrary consequences, they so strikingly
 exhibit to every intelligent reader of ec-
 clestiaistical history; you will judge of the
 propriety of the application; you will
 no longer question the expediency of
 thus marking out the one, as that true
 glory, by which the Lord wrought such
 wonders on the minds of the beholders
 of his plenitude of grace and truth, and
 afterwards on the admirers of the manners
 of his first disciples and their immediate
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successors. You will also account for the degeneracy and subsequent disgrace, into which they sunk of course, in after ages, by their base departure from it. Men of more avowed and barefaced profligacy struck with the glaring inconsistencies between the professions and practices of such infamous hypocrites, would very naturally, first vent their scorn and contumely upon these miserably false, yet solemn pretenders to preach, and believe in a superintending Providence, a crucified Saviour sent from God, a judgment to come, a heaven and hell.

SECTION III.

Consequent Derision.

CONFIRMED the more in their own unbelief by the detected hypocrisy of a few conspicuous and leading characters among it's professors, it is no wonder the unprincipled adversaries of our faith should exult in so plausible a pretence for rejecting, with scorn and derision, what

what before they had reluctantly treated with a degree of respect. They would revile it's awful sanctions, which they beheld more notoriously disgraced by the lives of it's formal devotees, than by all their grossest invectives. They would no longer credit the cordial and undissembled reverence which they might have seen regularly paid to the laws and doctrines of the gospel, by the wisest and worthiest of men. Despairing to imitate, habitually inclined to calumniate the humble piety, and virtue unimpeachable of the real Christian, they affected to confound his character with that of the vilest of those dissemblers, the constant butt of their deserved contempt, though as opposite as light to darkness, as heavenly truth to hell-born false pretence. Of the solid but simple, not obvious, nor obtrusive graces of the former, they could form no just idea ; while the craft of those dealers in the mere outside forms of sanctity was hourly enforced upon their notice, by the contrast of their private conduct with the solemn gravity, and stately pride, by which they cunningly carried on their impious traffick.

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In the spiritual arrogance and perfidy of these early apostates from genuine Christianity, it's keen antagonists were supplied with a never-failing fund of scorn and ridicule. This must often have occurred familiarly to your observation, from every page of the history of the church; but most conspicuously in the accounts delivered of the impostures of enthusiasm, and the consequent insolence of libertinism during the darkness of the middle centuries. In all ages of the world indeed there have arisen many open enemies to all seriousness, sobriety and good conduct, as bold and avowed advocates, and professors of vice and licentiousness, as of infidelity and atheism. Both before and since that dreary period, from similar causes have proceeded similar effects. But then it was, especially in times of extreme ignorance and barbarism, that the deplorable corruption of the clergy, and the consequent triumph of all ungodliness, accomplished the fatal event predicted, and laid the spotless beauty of religion low in the dust.

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A combination of two different causes, that bear little or no visible affinity to each other, appears of late to be strangely conspiring to tarnish, and cast a temporary shade upon the glorious light of the gospel, in the eyes of the superficial observer. The epidemical illusion of the numerous tribes of followers of certain pretenders to extraordinary sanctity, their unintelligible rants and increasing absurdity are a subject of serious concern and regret to all sound and sober thinkers. They give occasion to the most aggravated and wanton mockery of religion itself, thus confounded with it's wretched semblance. Against this contagious phrenzy, in vain would Common Sense, would calm Expostulation interpose their friendly and salutary aid. Reason, soundness and sobriety of Thought, are the very foes, against whom they are most exasperated, they denounce the most outrageous war. Another object of more immediate alarm to the public peace and security, is considered as equally injurious to the interests of "*the religion pure and undefiled before God.*" A violent political ferment in the minds of men, into which

which the critical circumstances of the times have cast these kingdoms, has given a fresh and unbounded loose to the extravagance of the profane scorners. Disdainful of the settled rules of decency and discretion in manners or discourse, and indignant at what they deem an excessive rigour of the laws enforced by government, they have now, for a long time, been proclaimed to be ready, like a torrent partially confined, to break forth, with the greater fury, in another direction. Their insults are said to be the more open and daring against the Divine Majesty, in which they imagine they are left to indulge their utmost licence without restraint. Whatever degree of trust you may think fit to give to these reports, the credit of which, no doubt, is lessened by over-strained declamations, there certainly seems to be a pressing call for your especial and redoubled watchfulness. You must indeed at all times be prepared to repel their attacks, to which your clerical profession, the cause of humanity, and of sacred truth, all demand your able and spirited resistance.

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SECTION IV.

The Crime defined.

THAT you may discharge this duty aright, it is requisite to determine first in your own minds an exact and clear idea of the crime you are engaged to oppose. It is treating *true* religion with mockery and insult. Observe precisely here, how far it is *true* religion, the heaven-descended revelation of the word and will of God that is insulted by this mockery, or how far it concerns the misconstructions, or perversions of it, as professed or administered by fallible man. In this determination you cannot be too explicit. For instance—It is the spurning at the laws of God. Is the scorner aware by whose authority these laws are constituted? By that of the supremely wise Author of the human soul, of a voluntary agent, endued with suitable faculties, which these laws direct him to improve
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and apply to their right and proper use, and deter him from depraving by a wrong bias. The impression of these laws is stamped upon the heart of man, with different degrees of strength. It may be changed or vitiated by the frailty or degeneracy of an imperfect creature. It may then be no longer worthy of respect. It may cease to be true religion, and these adulterated laws to be the laws of God.—It is the rejection of sacred truths. These are either such as are improperly stiled innate, but are more justly described, as universally, though gradually, imparted to the human mind by the due exertion of it's natural faculties, and are the objects of what is called natural religion ; or they are such as have been declared and unfolded, or more perfectly confirmed by a particular revelation. By both are established, with various degrees of evidence, our grounds of faith in the justice, the goodness of Almighty God, and the dependance of man upon his Providence and moral government. Resulting from this faith necessarily arises a system of laws and moral duties, inseparably connected with our dearest

est hopes, our most afflicting fears. The scorner, who, rebellious against our almighty and all-gracious Sovereign, dares to deride these truths, these laws, these hopes and fears, is madly conspiring to involve all who hear him in the same perdition with himself.—It is, in short, a combination, to bring into discredit those everlasting sanctions, upon which the solid basis rests of all our rectitude of conduct, in regard to ourselves, our neighbour, our God, of all our present satisfaction, all our future happiness.—It is a crime always shockingly offensive to every uncorrupted and sound understanding, since the world began. The most important interests of mankind in general, require men of all designations, ranks and professions, to join with you, in a vigorous and constant opposition to it. The concern to all, in exact propriety of speech, is infinite. To its baleful influence no period can be fixed in the dark regions of eternity.

CHAP.

CHAPTER III.

Mode of Expostulation.

SECTION I.

Proper Temper in the Reprover.

THE religion of Christ has been often brought into discredit, by a temper and spirit in it's advocates, quite opposite to that of it's Blessed Founder. It has been strangely disparaged by the absurdity of doctrines falsely ascribed to it, and frightfully disfigured by superstition, ignorance and folly. Let it be your generous purpose, upon all occasions, to display it's amiable, beneficent and conciliatory spirit. You will thus do the most laudable service in your power to true religion; though enthusiasm and bigotry will

will regard unthankfully, and with affected indignation, a mirror, which to them will reflect nothing but their own deformity. Without inflaming their black and cankered passions, you will mildly make mankind aware of the pernicious tendency, as well as the fallacy of their several corruptions of plain gospel truth.

Too true it is that theological factions, all alien from the pacific spirit of the mild and beneficent Jesus, have grossly perverted his primitive doctrines. The Lord himself thought fit to check the premature expectations, which his disciples had formed of his kingdom and its immediate blessings. It was indeed adapted, by Infinite Wisdom, to cherish throughout universal charity, rational piety, meekness, humility and mutual forbearance. How then, instead of “** bringing peace on earth,*” could he “*send a sword*” into it? His general laws he ordained to regulate a set of free moral agents, whom he came to instruct and amend, not literally to create anew. Their

• Matt. x. 34.

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prejudices, ill tempers and ungodly lusts, he foresaw would, in many respects, impel them to counteract these laws, to render them engines of perpetual feuds. How profanely have they been abused, to serve the purposes of base and disorderly passions, ambition, avarice and luxury? How has it been possible that under external pretences of respect for his doctrines, these soul-debasing qualities, productive of such dire effects, should have been shrouded from general contempt and abhorrence? Is there, in all nature, an object analogous to such a total extinction of all moral sense, such an utter dereliction of all the vital powers of religion; and that in the minds of men whose ardour and intemperate zeal is apparently inflamed to such excess? Yes, a familiar one presents itself to the physical inquirer. The nerve that is extremely convulsed by a violent morbid affection, is liable, in consequence, to become torpid, if not utterly lifeless.

In censuring the exorbitance of passion, they betray, in vindication of what they may deem a righteous cause, let us be especially

cially cautious ourselves to set them the example of a better temper. Let us compassionate the disordered fancy of those, who will permit us to esteem them well-meaning zealots ; nor accuse of hypocrisy, or malignity of heart, what perhaps a natural infirmity, or a malady caught by contagion, may have brought upon them. But with the determined steadiness of decent resentment, let it be our study to efface completely from the character of the religion of Christ, the preposterous imputation, and foul aspersions of it's giving countenance to these extravagancies. In all respects and true points of view, they are manifestly of a quite contrary tendency. While they raise our minds to *give glory to God on high*, they perpetually inculcate *peace on earth, and goodwill towards men*. The false accusation is as wretchedly absurd as it would be to ascribe the darkness and horrors of a stormy night to the all-cheering light of the sun. Blessed is the man who, with uniform benignity, shall display the living pattern of it's true character, shall rise above all the pitiful suggestions of presumptuous enthusiasm, party preju-

dice, or sordid selfishness. Highly approved is he, by our all-gracious God, who shall calmly, yet constantly, set his face against that *heretical*, or contentious spirit, which still prevails among the indiscreet zealots in every church, without exception. By the singular blessing of Heaven, it rages least of all in our own; and this justice has now been long conceded to it, with the unanimous consent of all the rest. God grant it may from henceforth enjoy the glory of having utterly subdued that intolerant overbearing spirit, which counteracts all the natural effects of Christianity, in perfecting the virtue and happiness of man.

Against ignorance, obstinate prejudice, nay, the most perverse and wilful deviation from the spirit of the gospel, you will remember always that it is the most unseemly mode of opposition to "*answer the fool according to his folly*," the scorner with mockery, the hot-brained bigot, and religious party-scribbler with rancour and personal reproach. It is equally inconsistent with the character of a man of sound judgment, and with the decent discharge

charge of the duties of your profession. For the involuntary mistakes of other men especially, you will be sensible that discreet and sober argument, urged with tenderness and a secret compassion, ought always to be used in preference. To this command of temper, not heavenly-minded Charity alone invites you. It is one of the best lessons you are taught by worldly wisdom, through the willing heart of an opponent to seek the most open and ready access to his understanding.

SECTION II.

The Dogmatist and Sceptic.

TO enable you the better to execute this beneficent office with a proper temper, it will be requisite first to obtain, and then to bear constantly in mind, a clear idea of the distinct characters of those, whose errors you are called to reprove, endeavouring indeed to keep "*the unity of the spirit,*" but always "*in the bond*
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of peace." This is your peculiar province. Be it your highest glory; all other ambition or interest being cast down far beneath it. Of these opponents then, the first with whom we may suppose you to be engaged, as the most commonly liable, at this day, to put your temper to the proof, are the Dogmatist and Sceptic, characters strongly contrasted, yet agreeing in many more points than you may be at first aware. Observe the man who, in a peremptory and haughty tone, decides upon any dark and questionable doctrine, without being solicitous to support that doctrine by any solid, or even intelligible argument. This is a pitiable weakness merely, as far as it regards his solemn self alone. But when he imposes that decision upon the judgment of other men, by dint of any *fallible* authority, however highly exalted in the opinion of his party, without submitting it to a fair and free scrutiny, this you will pronounce a culpable dogmatism. To enforce that imposition with anathemas, formidable only in sound, betrays a conscious want of any rational power of defence. They are the

the blusterings of a dastardly bully. But they are no longer *bruta fulmina*, they become horrible in their consequences, when enforced by oppression of every denomination, by the *ratio ultima* of a cruel magistrate, or a more dreadfully tyrannical mob, by penalties and outrages shocking to humanity. These are an insult to Heaven so gross, that it is inconceivable what idea the perpetrators can have formed to themselves of the divine nature. Upon such religious pretences can it be possible to fix too foul a name?

But your attention is now recalled from thence, to contend with an adversary equally stubborn and intractable—Scepticism, which less blasphemously indeed, but more directly, leads to infidelity. Against the approach of this less violent, but treacherous foe, you will have the more frequently occasion to stand upon your guard, as he comes with a less forbidding mien. Though men of candour yourselves, expect from neither any real portion of that amiable quality, shamelessly cried down of late by venal and factious scribblers. You will observe these

two extremes in perpetual variance with each other. Yet, upon a nearer view, you will be struck with a strange similarity in their habits and complexions, alike unfriendly to reason, truth, and mental improvement. The one rejects them with rude invective, the other with a polished sneer. Both are decisive, with blind obstinacy, against any modest tender you can make of important information respecting the main tendency and true spirit of the gospel of Christ. Such is the stiffness of the sceptic, and such the phrenzy of many a modern enthusiast, that they both, with the same pertinacity, renounce the power of reason. They affect especially to condemn it's presumption, in pretending to support, or elucidate by argument, a single article of faith, though it be one, of which it has pleased the merciful Creator of the human mind that it should be able to attain the clearest evidence.

It may occasionally be your misfortune, as it has been mine, to attend in silence to the ridiculous disputes, carried on with as great animosity as absurdity,
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by two of these doughty antagonists, alike incapable of confutation, and alike exasperated against an absent adversary, *Reason*, who, whilst they are blindly dealing their random strokes at each other, is sure to keep out of the way. From the puffed and windy Dogmatist, whilst the frantic fit is on him, you will, of course, in conformity to her example, keep your distance due. With the Sceptic also, when devotedly enslaved to his ungodly lusts, and by them incorrigibly biassed against all religion, you will esteem it vain for rational or mild persuasion to contend. But experience and reflection will teach you here to make some discrimination of characters, distinct from either of these opposite, yet similar extremes, of insolent assertion and denial, in direct contradiction to evidence and common sense. An adversary there is to rational religion, of a shrewder and less unpolished cast than either. It is with a well-bred sceptic of this sort, that you may expect, at this day, a more frequent, and seemingly a fairer challenge to dispute. He will affect a candid attention to your argument, with a purpose only to object, and

and prevent it's leading to any conclusion. The name he assumes implying *consideration*, he intreats you to regard him as a more ingenuous objector than the above declared enemies to all free disquisition. Do not flatter yourselves, on this appearance of docility, with a probable chance of bringing soon your contest to a prosperous issue. Acuter, cooler, and commonly better informed than either of the foregoing, because, from profession and habit, he must keep up an apparent readiness to receive information, he may seem not unwilling, nay sometimes desirous, for awhile, civilly to accompany you in the plain and strait middle path which leads to the temple of truth; yet expect, in conversing with him, by the way, perhaps a less rude and offensive, but still a perplexing and afflictive trial of your patience.

“ Religion, he may allow, is a subject of inquiry proper enough for men of leisure, and of a certain age, provided it lays no shackles on our conduct, and is carried on with that unlimited freedom which is generally allowed in the prosecution of any other science. He considers none,
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for his part, as meriting the name of science, where he may not openly withhold his assent from every thing, which accords not perfectly with his own mind. Politics and religion especially, or the sciences of government, human and divine, as they are of the highest importance, will he least of all endure to hear excepted. He condemns, he approves of nothing, without a thorough investigation. Of all men he is the most open to conviction. All he modestly craves, is unquestionable and absolute demonstration of every thing that is proposed to him as a matter of faith."

It will be here incumbent on you to point out precisely how far this gently-stern requisition is consistent with wisdom, or plain common sense. When you have endeavoured to make him sensible how far only his demand is just, you will be ready to oblige him, if you can, with respect to all points, that will admit of absolute demonstration: but you must make him understand that you have many things to propose to his attention, which are not exactly of that nature. The divine interference, for instance, by a Particular Providence,

Providence, in any one singular event of human life—the moral agency of man, independent of absolute physical necessity—the natural immortality of the soul, as consequent upon it's immaterial substance—the reality of a revelation from God, especially of the Christian, established upon well-attested facts, rendered most credible, when submitted to the strictest scrutiny of human reason. — All these points, you will tell him, you are ready to maintain, with so high a degree of probable evidence, as no rational man can refuse to assent to—It is no matter—This will not content him. In his negatives, though most improbable, he still persists.

“To *prove* these negatives,” he cries, “you cannot demand from me. In no fair argumentation is that allowable. I pretend to no such thing. I only beg leave to retain them still, with my privilege of doubting, till you are so kind as to produce a positive proof of your affirmatives, entirely to my satisfaction. You will excuse my putting your strength to
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so fore a trial. But the task, without dispute, indispensably lies upon you."—

The transient smile of triumph, that may probably accompany this apostrophe, you will happily disconcert. Be of good courage; Heaven and Truth are on your side. Preserve your patience, though you hear him declare, that "being professedly in utter darkness himself, he can admit no sure belief that there exists any where a single ray of light." You will expose, in glowing colours, the pernicious consequences of his rejecting that, which the dearest interests of society, it's good order, security and happiness, which his own intimate concerns require to be generally believed. You will not find him yet inclined to afford you hope of a speedy acquiescence.—"To what purpose," he will coldly ask, "is this eloquent appeal to my passions, upon a point, which my reason alone is competent to decide? Your notions may, perhaps, be true: but to bring my judgment to assent to them, you must support them with a force of evidence sufficient to render all doubt impossible." —You will not long have occasion to redouble,

redouble, in reply, your pathological regret at his fatal indifference. Though anxious, for a while, to remain unmoved in his beloved suspense, unwilling to quit his hold on airy nothing, though jealous of your betraying him to embrace unwelcome truths; a secret apprehension of their mighty moment to his present, his future, and for aught he can alledge to the contrary, his eternal welfare, will not suffer itself to lie idle in his bosom. He still contends against it, hemming his darling passions round with a guard of counter-probabilities, all looking different ways at once, and each contradictory to all the rest, as well as to itself. You will have driven these his faint satellites to skulk behind the broad impenetrable shield of their boldest champion, ingenious Nonsense, which, possessing the magic property of being neither true nor false, is secure in its defiance of all confutation. Though somewhat incommoded by this familiar phantom, you well know your only method of dispelling it, by reclaiming the attention of the Sceptic to his own constant declaration :—"No enemy is he to information. It is the grand object of his

his unceasing researches. All he sets his face against is a mere pretension to the knowledge of truth, without moral *evidence*. Afford him but this, and he is ever ready to give ear to any well-grounded problem, though propounded to him from the mouth of a priest"—

Take him at his word. Make it appear that the articles you mean to enforce are such as you really understand, and can prove, with the highest possible degree of evidence, short of absolute or mathematical demonstration, of which they are naturally unsusceptible. Moral certainty is to him a horrible spectre. At it's felt approach he is thrown into a cold sweat. His objections crowd in afresh. Mistrust and scruples instantly start up, with a train of dreaded consequences, all threatening to disturb and restrain him in his present enjoyments. Continue to display to him, in contrast, the happier state of that mind, which abiding stedfast in the faith established by a divine revelation, can strengthen it's confidence in the most joyful truths, can cheer with vivid light the faint in-

timations

timations of unassisted reason, can rejoice in the gracious purposes of God, held forth in that gospel which sanctions the sublimest hopes that the heart of a good man can form, whilst it mercifully excites the fears ordained by Providence to be attendant upon conscious guilt. Be fully assured yourselves that your adherence to the great articles of religion natural and revealed, rests on solid and clearly intelligible arguments, and the testimony of evidence incontestable. To these you will sedately insist on recalling his attention, undisturbed at his frequently recurring petulance, or his persevering determination to one point alone, to yield assent to nothing.

It is now your time to put him in mind that, if constant to his ruling maxim, he must of course decline a peremptory dissent from any thing he cannot clearly disprove. This may restore him to his assumed character of an humble Searcher. Depend upon it, at some auspicious moment, the dread of impending danger from the looseness of his principles, the sense of present misery and

and shame will impel him to wonder, upon a nearer view of the road to salvation, that he could wilfully have abandoned, could ever have lost sight of the obvious and most eligible intermediate path between Superstition and Incredulity. Your future labour will proceed smoothly according to your wish. The opening prospect you will present of bliss inconceivable, "*such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, as never entered into the heart of man,*" will produce it's effect. These objects and motives, if their influence on you is manifested, will not fail to excite in his breast, an emotion, in some degree, corresponding to your own.

He may henceforth learn to speak, with a more decent reserve, of that solid strength of argument, cemented by well-attested facts, which ascertains the stability of your grounds of faith. This you will assert your readiness to explain, with that only degree of precision, to confirm with that only degree of evidence, which imperfect reason, the unthankfully abused, yet gracious boon of Heaven, the invaluable faculty, which he so extrava-

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gantly magnifies at one moment, and so inconsistently depreciates the next, can possibly apprehend. He may be taught at length to regard, with reverence and gratitude, the sanctions of a divine revelation, to the awful objects of your belief. He may blush to argue any longer against their existence, from his own ignorance of their intimate nature, essence, or properties. Upon these you will always speak with the profoundest humility. You will be as ready as himself to confess that no perfectly adequate idea of them can appertain to the faculties of so imperfect a creature as man.

Of Christianity, you may, perhaps, hear him now honestly confess, he never yet had caught the slightest glimpse.—“It was only its vain shadow, incomprehensible jargon, and insignificant formalities, that have been hitherto presented to my notice. Its features and complexion, animated with that divine benevolence, which you tell me it breathes throughout in the gospel, I admire, I wish to know where upon earth I am to look for it. Nothing like it do I behold exhibited, in
any

any one established or unestablished church in Christendom. Nothing more unlike it can be imagined, he may add, (with a civil compliment to what he may probably call our *somewhat* reformed plan, at home) than the ridiculous, but delusive mask it wears in all Popish countries."

To this last assertion you will in the main agree. But, you may assure him, if he can persuade himself to break loose from his former prejudices and companions, he will find, among the consistent members of our Protestant, and more truly Christian church, a far greater portion of that pure evangelical spirit, of which the Dogmatist and Bigot had taught him to form so many frightful, false and contradictory notions. However justly indignant at the abominable impositions of Popery, he may now be rather inclined to join with you, in congratulating our countrymen, upon the liberal temper displayed of late by the British Parliament, in their milder mode of treatment, unanimously adopted, toward the adherents to Popery, a religion ridiculously stiled catholic, who, from a mental illumina-

tion insensibly communicated in this free country, have been striving to make it wear, in many respects, much less of the horridly forbidding aspect it formerly wore.

SECTION III.

The Papist.

THE moderation purposed, in future, to be observed by our government, in regard to Papists, has, I trust, with very few exceptions, been generally approved. What consistent Protestant can possibly object to it? But Protestants are not always consistent, any more than statesmen or patriots. It is justifiable, no doubt, it is loyal, it is philanthropic to * *abhor, detest and abjure* certain *abominable doctrines* of the Romish superstition, subversive of all sure foundation of morality, and consequently of all good faith in their transactions with us, public or pri-

* Vid. oath of allegiance.

vate. Hence, we know, have sprung jealousies and fears in some minds, against which we are provided, in this island, with ample security. The errors of Popery, most dangerous to the state, when exploded from the continent, are not likely to be countenanced anew in Britain. Her spiritual dominion over the consciences of more than half the Christian world, is suddenly passing away like a shadow. Hardly will it be visible, in the face it is preparing to wear, that it ever seriously existed. The most obsequious of her sceptered votaries and croziered statesmen have openly, in deeds if not in words, long disowned it. All its most generally respected professors in England (we may trust their public declaration of it) are now impelled, with shame and repentance, to disclaim their future submission to its most irrational and slavish tenet. The errors, no longer mischievous to the public, which they still maintain, they will urge, from henceforth, "*si non castè, tamen cautè.*" Their expertest champions will bear in mind the shrewd hint of the Stagyrte to a man convicted

victed of false pretence, " * when water choaks thy gullet, why drink on ?" No priest, prelate or pontiff will they now presume to regard as empowered to dissolve the obligation of their oaths and engagements to heretics. No prince or potentate has any thing now to fear from the degraded and spiritless ex-monarch of their consciences, whose predecessors trampled formerly upon their imperial necks, deprived them of their crowns, set their subjects free from all allegiance to them, put their whole kingdoms under an interdict, justified massacres, and sainted the most execrable assassins, devoted to the cause of their church.

The best intents and purposes of our present rulers have been censured with no less acrimony than those of the most absurdly calumniated, and profanely extolled administrations, which have gone before them. But the lenient measure in question, the most furious of their assailants cannot, consistently with their own

* 'Όταν το ύδωρ του φαρυγγα πνιγη, τι δει ετι πινειν'

principles,

principles, condemn. To their provident sagacity it bears no less honourable testimony than to their temperate spirit. Let due praise be allowed them for the repeal of laws disgraceful to our statute-book, for which we have only such poor apologies as these to make, that they were enacted "*in terrorem*," upon the spur of fresh provocation, "*recentibus odii*," or from political *Necessity*. To expose the futility of the last, most customary plea of statesmen, the original invention of which Milton ascribes to one, whom it is not easy to imagine the boldest wight could be proud of acknowledging for his master, let it be sufficient to say, that what had been alledged to be a matter of necessity, it has never been found expedient, or secure from mischief, to put in execution. So that in this particular instance, the most general cry against the government, for a lavish expenditure, would certainly be misapplied. The inestimable credit they have obtained for an equitable and liberal conduct, in this measure, has indeed been cheaply purchased.

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The commendation here given of the conciliatory conduct observed of late toward the once most virulent foes to the church of England, supposed to be now no longer formidable to it, is not retracted here from a former edition of this work; your Addresser being still persuaded of it's propriety, notwithstanding some plausible arguments, since advanced in opposition to it.—“You are urged to keep a watchful eye to preserve your flocks from the dangerous machinations of the spreading swarms of Popish priests, of every shape and colour, whom we have fostered in our bosoms.”—The advice and caution * are certainly right. But these are enforced by vague reports, that the success of their incessant eagerness to diffuse the pestilent virus of their slavish doctrines, is by many recent facts rendered notorious in every corner of the nation, as well as the treacherous concurrence with them of the Romish clergy long settled here. If you really credit the veracity of these reports, which I can

* Of the anonymous author of the *Pursuits of Literature*.

neither

neither warrant nor disprove,—“that great mischief is actually pressing from that quarter to the vitals of our excellent establishment,” you will have a lively sense of the peculiar exigence now laid upon you, to assist the vigilant circumspection of the ruling powers, in a charge which, in such ticklish circumstances, requires the wary caution of countless eyes properly to fulfil. Complaint is made, that to these salutary warnings too many of our order are blind and deaf. In the number of these, it has been gently hinted, that your humble Addresser is included, on account of the unwillingness he has expressed to lend a startled ear to the exaggerated accounts of dire perils imminent to the state from a party, whose inconsiderable number, power and influence, he was then persuaded to regard as tolerably well ascertained.

A more grievous imputation still is superadded, that he gives no credit to the alarms of the danger that threatens us, in a similar outcry against the democratical tenets of our Protestant sectaries. After taking some pains to be truly informed,
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he confesses they still appear to him unsupported by credible authority. That the dangerous notions in question have been rashly uttered by a few indiscreet persons of that designation, of little weight or esteem amongst them, for abilities or character, cannot be denied ; while a vast majority, including all the most respected teachers of their various tribes, honestly and loudly disavow them. When you have an opportunity, (which I would advise you seriously to embrace), of conversing freely with the most judicious and best informed men of their several persuasions, they will convince you, that so far from wishing to subvert our ecclesiastical establishment, in order to raise up one of their own ; were the latter event actually to take place, they would have just reason to apprehend a change for the worse in their own individual situation. Whatever a few restless and misjudging spirits have madly vented in a fit of moody disaffection, they know their real interests too well to think of promoting religious liberty by dint of public disorder and confusion. What could their expectation then be,

when

when grounded on past experience of the disconsolate condition of all the sincerely pious, upon the subversion of our church a century and half ago? Since the happy resettlement of legal order and tranquillity, the temperate and liberal conduct generally, if not uniformly observable in the leading members of the establishment, they are ingenuously ready to allow. But a mode of friendly expostulation with them, upon some few particulars, shall be submitted to your consideration by and by.

Returning now to the alarms lately spread of dangerous purposes hatching in secret, and ready to burst forth among the English Romanists, I am *impelled* * to notice what an internal unwillingness to credit would have inclined me to neglect. While fondly deeming that, with the fallen state of the Popedom, all terror from a supposed apparition of it's departed spirit, stalking still abroad in this land, was utterly extinguished, the following passage in the ingenious work of an acute

* Έκον ἀκονή γε θυμῷ.

Hom. Il. Δ. 43.

poeti-

poetical critic, has lately met my eye.—
 * “To the revival of the Roman cause
 in Great Britain, *pestis ero vivens*. In our
 dread and natural horror of atheism and
 of anarchy, why are we to revive super-
 stition and tyranny?”—This pertinent
 query would claim our anxious regard,
 if we did not repose due confidence in
 the vigilant care of our superintendants
 spiritual and temporal. My cool uncon-
 cern at this dreaded surmise, I am told,
 I may see corrected, on perusal of the vi-
 rulent and intolerant principles, displayed
 in the writings of Mr. John Milner, a Ro-
 mish priest, resident at Winchester. En-
 couraged, it seems, by the indulgence
 of government, he more than insinuates
 the combinations of his party, to urge
 vehemently fresh petitions, remonstrances,
 demands. He passionately inveighs a-
 gainst the loyal expressions in the late
 protestation of the rational and moderate
 Papists.

† Afraid lest we Protestants should
 think the spirit of his church had suffer-

* Pursuits of Literature, Part iv. P. 27.

† Ib.

ed any abatement,—“ Thus to my judgment,” he cries out, “ am I and the whole catholic body, without consenting to it, pledged, in the face of the Legislature, to condemn the wars of Charlemagne, and the crusade against the infamous Albigenes.”—The good people thus madly branded with unmerited infamy, shall be justly described in the sequel of this Address. In the mean time, I shall here subjoin to this strange sally of a furious bigot, the very interesting remark made upon it by the quick-sighted critic before quoted.—“ I hope we are all children of mercy, trained and educated in the benevolence and charity, which Christ has taught and enforced, and if we have read the history of that infernal and murderous persecution of the devoted Albigenes, (whose chief crime was their determined opposition and resistance to the papal tyranny,) what opinion or comment shall we form on this merciless priest, who after the lapse of centuries, feels the same passions and the same thirst of blood against these innocent victims of popish and arbitrary violence? *Crimine ab uno disce omnes.*”—Ps. of L. Ib.

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To the justness of all, but the short concluding sentence of this remark, you will readily subscribe your cordial approbation. But here permit me to propound to this very keen polemic a slight query in his own way. Is it quite prudent, in our present circumstances, to affront indiscriminately every individual member of that whole body, with an—* Avaunt alike both friend and foe? Shall we hazard an unseasonable rejection of the voluntary tender of allegiance to our sovereign, and good wishes for the stability of our happy constitution, for the lenity of which, we trust we see a sincerely grateful sentiment expressed by all the most respectable part of that communion? Shall we be led to this indiscretion by the intemperate and silly speeches of a few, very few, hot-brained party-zealots?—"But this Milner," says the Critic, "represents the opinions of a very large portion of their body, by whom he is accredited."—Does he say this upon the single authority of the priest himself? You will, I suppose, pay more attention

* Ἐπείλω φίλος σὺν ἄνδρῳ. PINDAR.

to the contrary, attestation of the well-known and most respected persons of their body, who declare, that it is only a *very small* and insignificant part of it, who are rash enough to utter (what they disavow with scorn) such foolish menaces, as betray only impotence and frenzy. They appear, indeed, so exceedingly ridiculous, that you will not easily believe that any surmise of great mischief impending from them can seriously have created those violent emotions, which seem to urge the keen *Pursuits* of this eagle-eyed Hunter. Could any thing more opportunely befriend the Protestant cause than these extravagant assertions of the merciless Papal tyranny, thus exposed, without disguise, by one of its blindly devoted priests? This is a time, no doubt, for circumspection and strict watch against our insidious, and for spirited exertions against our assaulting foes; but not for the haughty rejection of the proffered good-will of any man, or set of men, however differing from us in points unessential to the public safety. For a bold and free expostulation with them upon doctrinal points it is incumbent

bent on you to qualify yourselves, by a careful and diligent study of the many invaluable tracts produced in our successful controversy with them, before the close of the last century. To the government belongs the adoption of prudent measures, conciliatory of such reciprocal affection as may, in future, through a sense of mild and equitable treatment, attach them to us with the bands of sincere and lasting amity.

Your opposition still to every pernicious Popish doctrine you will maintain, upon all proper occasions, with unremitted earnestness. In respect to this branch of your duty, allow me, without offence, to subjoin a remark, which our Reformed Church may, with great regret, apply to many amongst you, upon whose abilities to defend it, with the grace of God, it has a constant claim, it reposes a certain reliance for it's security against their apprehended encroachments. It has occasionally been matter of serious concern to me to hear the frank acknowledgment of young English Clergymen, of no contemptible proficiency in other kinds
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of learning,—“ that the controversy of Protestantism with Popery, having, in their academical studies, been but seldom, and that slightly, recommended to their notice, they had bestowed very little attention upon what they considered as now grown obsolete, and no longer interesting to the state, and of no consequence to a candidate for church-preferment; and what, from unprofitable curiosity, they had no inducement to meddle with. What their superiors had exhorted them to attend to, as an object of more immediate alarm, was the imminent danger to our establishment, arising from our Protestant sectaries, but more especially from the bold sticklers for various amendments, in our forms and discipline, which they were engaged to declare, “ not only admirably well designed, but completely perfect.”—

If when called upon to discharge an obligation of such peculiar incumbency upon men of your profession, you can thus coolly confess yourselves unprepared to undertake it; attend to a serious suggestion.—You have, it seems, bestowed

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little or no previous consideration upon the subtle fallacies, by which the Romanists defend their grossest errors. Observe the consequence. Your amazement at their extreme absurdity, your disgust at what, if they never occurred to you before, will be to you utterly void of meaning, a mere gibberish of Babel, will disconcert you, but not them. Your indignation at the affront they are manifestly putting upon your understanding will be to them a matter of derision, of cheap and easy triumph, as a proof of their claimed superiority in point of argument. Think of the risque you will run of discrediting the cause of common sense and true religion, if when engaged to answer their ensnaring sophisms, you will be forced most shamefully to declare yourselves unequal to the task of confuting them. They must ever prove contemptible indeed, when fairly sifted. Yet I have witnessed, with surprize, the ridiculous confusion of men, neither deficient in acuteness of discernment, nor in those branches of literature, which they deemed of present currency; who have candidly confessed, that upon hearing them
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propounded, for the first time, though struck with their incompetency to explain what they were adduced to prove, they found themselves sorely puzzled beyond expectation. No intelligible reasoning could they oppose to what they strove in vain to apprehend. A pompous parade of learning, without knowledge, a specious phraseology, without sense or significancy of any sort, an invincible resistance to admit one ray of light; these are the paltry, yet impervious fence, not of the Papist alone, but of every blind and obstinate polemic, every mystical sectary, of all denominations in Christendom. It is only by a complete and adequate proof of the perfect simplicity, the plain intelligible meaning of the gospel tenets, that you can hope to confound, if not to silence, the shrewd impertinence common to them all, to the bigot, who perverts, and the infidel, who rejects it.

SECTION IV.

The Protestant Innovator.

AS certain members of our Church, who ventured, many years ago, to express their pious wishes for what they deemed both honourable and expedient emendations, in respect to it's articles, forms, and canons, are known to have incurred much illiberal censure for the same, let the short remark, inserted upon the occasion, in a former Edition, or brief Epitome, of this work, be permitted to remain uncanceled. But here it may not be amiss to subjoin a few more particular considerations upon the subject, at a crisis which demands our best endeavours to compose our internal differences. They will, I hope, not exasperate, but tend rather to assuage a little the captious humour of misinformed and misconceiving censors. Of these humble

Petitioners

Petitioners for the discreet and moderate reform proposed, there were two distinct, though equally well-meaning classes, whom the detractors of both generally chuse to confound. The former publicly addressed their request to the Honourable House of Commons, the latter, more privately, to their Right Reverend Superiors. To the latter, the Author openly avows his having acceded, with a most hearty concurrence of sentiment, from which he has never varied. His opinion of the immediate urgency of the approved amendments of a few imperfections, in what he sincerely regards as very excellent upon the whole, is this. He thinks there may be a plausible pretence admitted for some delay of the desirable measure, till those who may be appointed to conduct it can avail themselves of the additional aids, superadded to the lights obtained since the last *very distant* Revival, which have been gradually growing clearer and more steady. There is now a laudable and accurate study of the Bible sucessfully carried on, by a *few* men of learning and solid judgment.

Of the fruit of their pious labours there is great promise both at home and abroad.

If an uninformed Reader shall be pleased to express his wonder that one, who unauthorized, has arrogated to himself the thankless office of Adviser to his younger Brethren, should content himself with mentioning these bold Innovators, these portentous objects of his jealous apprehension, not only without a shudder or grave rebuke, but with apparent approbation; do not balk his pleasure in wondering, but raise it still higher, by telling him this strange, but well-attested story. — About five and twenty years ago, at mid-day! a company of these black spectres, who so affright him, were actually seen passing through the portal of the Archiepiscopal palace at Lambeth, avowing as they passed, the very purpose of introducing an innovation in the church! nay—*proh deum atque hominum fidem!*—most of these dire conspirators, after they had slept out the interim of their phantasma, or hideous dream, arose, and appeared unto many, raised up to the highest dignities,

dignities, and some of them seated upon episcopal thrones. Humble suppliants then, they signified their being come to petition their Right Reverend Superiors, and first his Grace, their Metropolitan, that they would mercifully vouchsafe to disentangle their consciences from certain scruples relative to forms and subscriptions. The Primate, the meek Dr. Cornwallis, being before apprized what the issue of such an application of course must prove, returned this ready answer; —“ The Parliament is summoned to meet next week. As many of my brethren as shall attend upon the summons, I shall call together, and acquaint them with your request. I know it expresses the wish of many worthy, and excellent members of our church. In ten days they came again, and received this decisive result of the Episcopal conference,—“ It is agreed that to listen to your request at this time would be neither safe nor prudent.” — With submission, it has been respectfully asked, Was the answer of their Lordships exactly reported? *Prudent* it certainly could not be, if not *safe*.

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The obvious intent of the foregoing simple narrative is to shew, that what upon the high authority of our spiritual Lords is declared *unsafe* for them to meddle with, it must be most *imprudent*, in an humble parochial clergyman, even to think of. It may indeed be presumed that every Englishman who has reflected, with judgment, upon the civil and ecclesiastical history of his country, is well apprized that we are indebted to occasional innovation, and wisely planned reforms, for what constitutes the peculiar excellencies of our admired establishment in church and state. He cannot, at the same time be unconscious, that seldom has the atchievement of redressing real grievances of long standing, been carried into execution, without some immediate convulsion, and temporary mischief, even when the salutary work has been entrusted to the ablest heads and hearts least influenced by selfish or factious motives. But when unseasonably undertaken, by men of corrupt and unstable principles, whose crafty professions and flattering promises are profusely lavished to a de-

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luded multitude, inflaming their worst passions for base private ends, what have their improvident abettors to expect but multiplied wrongs, and disgraces more afflictive than those, from which a preposterous impatience has impelled the easy dupes to seek relief of such perfidious champions.

These disqualifying circumstances in the character of a specious stickler for a reform, which he neither means to promote, nor seriously believes to be practicable, never escape a quick detection. At that instant, his boasted talents, bereft of all their power of illusion, leave him exposed to ignominy, not less reproachful than what he so plentifully, and indeed so justly, sheds upon the reptile worshipper of established error and abuse. It was the Providence of God that graciously ordained the events, which have combined to form the peculiar properties, which yet so honourably distinguish the genuine character of Englishmen. May he vouchsafe to render the general sense of present distresses and common dangers instrumental in teaching them
wisdom,

wisdom, in maintaining, through all the subordinate ranks of the community, that principle of cordial union, the very essence of national felicity, which alone is wanting to complete it's permanent strength and safety.

Then may it be in future, the sole contention between our Rulers and their Opponents, who best shall manifest the purity of his love of truth and right, by it's being uniformly regulated by a regard to public order, peace and harmony. You will probably smile at this Utopian wish, as utterly hopeless ever to see it realized in this mortal state, amidst the conflicting passions and interests of sublunary beings. In every human institution, without doubt, all men of exact information, cool judgment and reflection, will expect to see many glaring defects, which the pliant tool alone of the party that finds an interest in their continuance, will basely stoop to palliate. Far different is the conduct of the man, whose public spirit, animated by a sincere and consistent philanthropy, governed by just and rational principles, can never excite him to pursue

pursue any measures, tending to perpetuate mutual suspicion and mistrust, the bane, the death of all social union.

Let this object then be steadily kept in view, as a test of the purity of whatever assumes the title of patriotic sentiment. Is the anxious concern we profess really directed to the glory and permanency of our national constitution itself, or to the prosperity only of our particular station under it? We may confidently and justly esteem it the least imperfect of all human establishments. But if we affect to boast it's absolute perfection, do we not resist the means adapted to effectuate a nearer approach to it? Is it thus we think by blinding the eyes of it's defenders, to secure it against the attacks of it's internal and external foes? Let us impartially consider the probable hazard into which it may run, by striking rashly into either of the diverging lines of a perplexing dilemma, that keeps the genius of the wisest statesmen perpetually upon the rack.—Is the peril greater in abiding by all the consequences of certain palpable abuses, that bring discredit to that constitution, which we approve beyond

yond any other existent, or in encountering the risque of a violent political ferment, occasioned by the best concerted plan we can form to remove them?—To resolve this question with complete satisfaction, will often exceed the abilities of a man of the most enlarged understanding. But it requires no extraordinary portion of it to discern that a crisis must come, when temperate plans of reformation will be, not obtruded by unadvised or ill-designing speculatists, but voluntarily adopted, upon proof maturely weighed of their absolute expediency, by all the firmest friends of our legal establishment.

Upon this, as upon all other occasions, it becomes you still to maintain your indefeasible right of private judgment, uncontrolled, on the one hand, by the declared opinion of men, ambitiously engaged in factious intrigues, or on the other, by that of persons, who from power and patronage assume an indisputable title to be always in the right. When you have unmasked the baseness of a devoted adherent, without honour or principle, to either
of

of these opposite parties, you will conceive little hope that any good can arise, without a miracle, from your pious endeavours to instil into the servile and ambitious partizans of the separate factions, the slightest notion of your honourable sentiments. With your generous integrity of patriotic purpose, with your steadfast conformity to the unsullied character of a Christian, you must be sensible that no *miscreant* of either cast can be raised to any real sympathy. In that light you will silently regard them both alike, and shun, if possible, all familiar communication with either.

In the mean time, you will study to make yourselves well apprized, and be gratefully mindful of the peculiar excellencies of the admirably constituted plan of our national establishments, and the blessings resulting from them. You will omit no opportunity of propagating a cordial and well-grounded attachment to them in all you converse with. This becomes your indispensable duty, as being, by profession, promoters of good order and harmony. But as being also the un-

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bribed and intrepid advocates for important truth, you will never shrink from a bold assertion of what you know to be the essential requisites, in the lucky assemblage, and strong texture of which is placed the talisman that must fix the fate, the prosperity or distress, the dissolution or perpetuity of this excellent constitution. Of these the sincere and intelligent patriot will, at no time, utterly lose sight. Yet though zealously attentive to them, in all seasons, he will be well aware that all are not alike propitious to a spirited and rigorous contention for them.

On the following incontestible and constant requisites especially he will repose his most confident hopes.—It is in the maintenance in their due equilibrium of all the combined powers of the constituent parts, in the whole body politic.—It is in their complete harmony with the most essential, it's Supreme Head.—It is in the stedfast accord of all the officers or agents of the state, principal and subordinate, to submit all their operations to the exact and unbiassed scrutiny of those to whom the
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the nation has delegated that sacred trust.—It is upon the only laudable ambition of these important and *honourable* Trustees, faithfully to report the general voice of their constituents, freely to declare the judgment they pass upon all public measures, and manfully to maintain what they esteem their truest interests.—It is upon a grateful disposition, in the governed, to pay a due personal respect to their rulers, to entertain with equity and candour, a generally favourable opinion of their good intentions, yet conscientiously to pronounce an impartial judgment upon all their measures.—It is upon the actual existence of a greater proportion of honest men, among the Electors of the Representatives of the people, than the slavish tools of corruption are willing to believe, are desirous to find, or disposed to leave undepraved in their principles and morals.—It is, in short, upon the suitable deference, with which the Ministers of an English Sovereign ought ever to deem themselves, in all their agency, responsible to the censure of intelligent and worthy men, that the public welfare and security principally depend.—Their censure, a
vain,

vain, a selfish, or inconsiderate statesman may affect to hold in extreme contempt, whilst a wise one will be fully apprized, that amidst a multitude, confessedly ignorant and stupid, in the gross, this country nevertheless can boast a greater number of sagacious, well-informed, and accurate censors of the measures of it's rulers, through all their consequences, immediate and remote, than the records of any one political system upon earth has ever exhibited.

When the balance of a system so peculiarly blessed is duly maintained, very seldom will it admit the management of the public concerns to be long entrusted to unskilful or unfaithful hands. You will then condemn, as traiterous no less to the interests of the People than to those of the Sovereign, every exorbitant attempt of a factious leader to unsettle it. But as no earthly institution was ever exempt from an incidental abuse of power, delegated to mortal man, he is undoubtedly entitled to the thanks of the public, who shall fairly and dispassionately point it out. By the blessing of God, the disorders

orders springing up from time to time, in this ably-constructed, but complicated machine of our national establishment, it has, within itself, the ready means of rectifying, with the least possible detriment or danger. Most malevolent and criminal is the conduct of the man, who perfidiously sets up a mad pretence, from a cautious backwardness in government to accede to the redress demanded, (a caution justified by the extravagance of his ill-digested scheme) to renounce his allegiance to that authority, which, duly exercised, is our surest protector from wrong, the best guardian of our dearest rights from the rage of anarchy and brutal violence.

With a generous indignation averse from the opposite extremes, you will set your face alike against the vile sycophancy, and prostitution of principle, which impels a man outwardly to vindicate what his own conscience inwardly discerns to be really amiss in the maxims of a powerful patron; and against the malignity of a lawless opposition to his rulers, in contention for a pretended radical reform, which if brought to the test of sound
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reason, appears to be not at all understood. You will perceive, in the former, an open renunciation of all just and true ground or principle of thought or action, in the latter a manifestly fraudulent plea to cover the seditious practices of a party, rendered male-content from disappointed ambition. You will on both pronounce a decisive sentence of condemnation. They stand both convicted of an utter unconcern for the good of the community, whose feelings and common sense they alike thus insolently affront, the courtly slave, who palliates acknowledged grievances, and the subtle traitor, who exaggerates them, to embroil, and involve it in confusion worse confounded, and more pernicious than the disorders he *feigns* an ardent zeal to remedy.

My conscientious young Brethren will excuse an old man, for inculcating, (perhaps too repeatedly,) the importance, at this time, of their strict attention to an essential part of their duty; the exposing to the scorn of the public, the false and destructive maxims and principles of the
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fell prime movers of these contending factions. No better method does he know to recompose it's turbulent and disunited state, to establish unanimity in it's counsels, and security no less to it's spiritual enjoyments than to it's temporal possessions. This intrusion of political sentiments into a tract, addressed to persons, whose function is commonly considered as purely spiritual, might appear to need some apology, if liable to an imputation often indiscriminately cast upon the clerical character. It would admit of none, were the charge not improperly applied. Notorious, it is confessed, is the guilt of those, who are justly accused of blending two opposite interests, in the joint worship of God and Mammon, of those ecclesiastical * *factiousaries*, who convert their sacred office into a pitiful trade. Their conduct surely presents a striking contrast to that of those humble beings, the noiseless tenor of whose course disdains to court the favour of men; of those who study to do faithful service to

* An expressive term of Shakespear, no longer in use, but worthy to be restored to it.

the general cause of humanity and true religion, by describing, in all it's glory, a righteous government in church and state, blessed with the most essential of those requisites, a complete assemblage of which can seldom fail to render it peaceable and happy. But this service, let me boldly add, you can never perform truly and laudably, unless you resolve to withstand, with equanimity and an impartial spirit, the opposite extremes, on the one hand, of corrupt servility, on the other, of lawless licentiousness,

SECTION V.

The Protestant Dissenter.

WITH respect to those amongst our Dissenting Protestant Brethren, who understand themselves, and can explain to others the scruples which determine them to refuse being members of our Church - Establishment: we are accused of not shewing them the same candid

did dispositions as we do to the Popish recusants.—“What is the cause, they ask, of this different treatment?”—The occasion, it seems, (certainly not the excuse,) is traced from the gross invectives against the constitution and spirit of our Church, which have disgraced the publications of a few petulant declaimers, erroneously supposed to be in high estimation among our English * *Seſtaries*. The few intemperate railers in question are of that numerous class, who *modestly* assume to themselves the exclusive title of *Rational Dis-*

* It were to be wished this obnoxious term were never, without due discrimination, applied by us as a word of reproach to all those who cannot entirely approve of our forms and articles. Away from all who confide in the justness and strength of our cause, be so illiberal a token of impotent ill-will. When used with exact propriety, it obviously denotes the man, whose contentious and stubborn temper is directly opposite to the mild and conciliatory spirit of the gospel. Among Protestants especially, whose fundamental principle is the right of private judgment, let it only be applied to those untoward disputants, of any party or profession, whether established or tolerated, clerical or lay, whom want of charity, candour and moderation, (qualities which they ridiculously affect to hold in extreme contempt,) *cuts off*, that is excommunicates, in fact, from the Church of Christ, from the number of the faithful followers of the Prince of Peace.

senters,

senters, amongst whom, it is well known, all the most intelligent and generally esteemed preachers have condemned, and publicly censured the petulance falsely imputed to their whole class. Of this wretched plea for immoderate anger against them all, you will form a just opinion, if you compare the sentiment that suggested it, to the temper and conduct of those, who in calmer times will be universally allowed to have best consulted the honour of the Church of England. Let me here direct your earnest regard to * one illustrious Prelate especially, among several others, whose truly apostolical spirit and eminent talents will do it signal credit to latest posterity. While such men, and such principles continue to adorn it, *erit profecto, volente, probante Deo, erit perpetua*. These revered and worthily exalted characters indicate to us the readiest method of reclaiming these injurious separatists, or at least of sweetening their bitterness, by exhibiting in themselves the amiable example of a more genuine evangelical temper. It

* Dr. Watson, Bishop of Landaff.

is not by harshness and reviling that we can hope to reconcile or discountenance the opposers of decent order and harmony. It is not by imposing upon other men, as the indispensable terms of granting them our good-will and brotherly love, to see with our eyes, and not their own, in all disputable points. It is not by relapsing thus into that very absurd principle of the Church of *Rome*, that most clearly justified our departure out of it, and which no one can be tempted to assert, who has good sense enough to apprehend, and resolution to avow, what consistently maintained, should constitute the truest glory of the Church of *England*. It is not by turning aside from the gracious pattern set us by our blessed Lord, who took every occasion to give the Jews a favourable impression of the Samaritans, recommending them to promote a mutual reconciliation, by renouncing on both sides, an incentive to relentless hatred, an angry controversy about a point, apparently not of primary consideration, about the place where alone it was ordained, for a season, that Jehovah was to be worshipped.

With respect to some of the worthiest and most esteemed of our Dissenting Brethren, it is the firm persuasion of a cordial well-wisher to the stability of the Church of England, that our general conformity to that benign pattern would alone bring all our differences with them to a desirable issue. One common concern they profess, (and he trusts it is with great sincerity,) to regard with as constant an attachment as ourselves; the salutary influence of those christian principles, which are essentially required to co-operate with the laws of the land, for the maintenance of peace and good order in our civil society. Upon this ground, he has been meekly asked by one of these respected persons; "What accession did the Parliament mean to secure to the strength of our Constitution, civil or ecclesiastical, by perseverance in rejecting an humble petition lately made by the body of Protestant Dissenters, for an act of generous condescension, on our part, as we chuse to call it, or of strict justice, according to them? What detriment or danger could it have incurred by a contrary method? Could the disappearance of an
occasion

occasion of their sole remaining shadow of right to complain have created fresh disturbances? Can it be a matter of wonder that they should seriously express their sensible regret for the opportunity lost of the mutual good consequences of a removal of that single offensive imposition upon their religious professions? Might not our compliance have accelerated the accomplishment of a deliberate wish of many good men, on both sides of a bitterly contested pale, that a seasonable trial had been made, whether notwithstanding the passionate speeches of a few inconsiderate zealots, (that should only have excited a smile of pity for the indiscretion of their weaker brethren, and been instantly consigned to oblivion,) the repeal requested would have conduced to that undisturbed union of interests and affections, which no Sacramental Test, no Act of Uniformity, were at all adapted to effect? The dissenting party then, of whose disloyalty it appears, upon fair inquiry, that false apprehensions have been propagated, may again approve themselves as well affected to the Government of the Royal House upon the throne, and as ready to

to concur with us in defending the state and church against the inroads of Anarchy and Impiety, at the close of the present century, as they most eminently did, about the middle of it, against those of Tyranny and Superstition.

An invincible obstacle, it is said, would remain to their ever treating with a decent respect our establishment, while content itself to be still shackled with subscriptions and tests, from which they would then loudly boast the exemption, for which they had so long contended. Even now, it seems, they declare they have it in their power, at any time, to reform whatever shall appear to require an amendment in their separate systems, (without the formality of legal edicts,) obstinately refused to the requests of the conformist clergy and laity. Such boasts, no doubt, have been often petulantly thrown out. Mark, how prompt is the spirit of party to assert, nay, actually to believe, against experience, against conviction. It has happened repeatedly to your Addresser to recognize the unsoundness of this boast, in an unreserved and
friendly

friendly intercourse, epistolary and personal, with two excellent men, among their most celebrated preachers. They have ingenuously acknowledged the eligible serenity of his station, in the superior freedom he enjoyed of thought and utterance, not without implied complaints of hardships endured from the impatience of their untoward flocks, if they at any time opposed sound reasoning, and the gospel standard of simple truth, against certain deeply rooted, but untenable prejudices.

It is generally understood, that among our English Dissenting Protestants, the most numerous body are nearly consonant, in the profession of their religious tenets, to those of the established church. Their prime objection to it, they declare to be, the imposing upon it's members an assent to them, upon mere human authority. In expostulating with an ingenuous and fair disputant of this persuasion the following method may, perhaps, be most properly adopted;—'With what consistency do you urge this plea against us; and how can the imposition in question be a grievance to you in particular? It is incumbent
upon

upon you to explain this ; unless you chuse to alledge, it is purely for the relief of the tender consciences of persons dissenting alike from you and us, that you contend so passionately against a supposed spiritual tyranny, the practice of which can surely be no existent grievance to you, who profess to adhere to the doctrines of our church ? You are well informed that the most applauded preachers of your several congregations confess they often painfully feel a sore oppression dissimilar from this, by the senseless bigotry, and angry cavils of their most ignorant hearers. You will not, seriously speaking, affirm that you enjoy a more uncontrolled freedom of proposing your deliberate and mature opinions, than we possess of declaring openly whatever appears to us to constitute the true spirit of the religion of Christ. Can you more publicly assume the privilege of proposing amendments in your forms and discipline, than you have seen taken, with due discretion, and not only without offence to any, except to men unqualified to form a true and rational judgment upon the matter, but with an almost general approbation
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of the wisest and most respected among the established clergy? You must be strangely unacquainted indeed with our church government, or the practice of our ecclesiastical courts, if you can hesitate a moment to allow, that Heresy is a crime that no longer occurs, as a subject of prosecution there; that our Convocations are, in this respect, marvellously inoffensive, or as you perhaps may shrewdly stile them, prudently insignificant. Your objection then, allow it frankly, appears to be laid against our dormant laws, appointed formerly, no doubt, but applied no longer, as a rigorous check upon that freedom which is now assumed without control. If the repeal of an obsolete statute would content you, (a cheap sacrifice, God knows) most relentless must that champion of strict orthodoxy be, who would not rejoice to see that bare and mouldy bone of contention cast aside from you for ever.—

Be that as it may, it is hoped that the most judicious and pious disquisitors, as well without as within the legal inclosure, will

will in future concur in approving themselves possessed of the same liberality of spirit, that has dictated, from time to time, the humble suggestions before alluded to. We trust, that at some more suitable season than the present, our wise rulers will attend with temper and judgment, to the well-digested proposals of amendment, either respectfully tendered by faithful and intelligent members of our own church, or adopted from discreet hints, the result of sedate reflection, by the loyal and conscientious dissenters from it, true friends alike to decorum and peace, and equally averse from a licentious disregard to the authority of orderly government. A certain proof, in the mean time, that the benumbing property of that canonical rigor, which is objected against our establishment, is no impenetrable bar to the freedom of religious discussion, is this: Among all the Protestant churches abroad, there is a general coincidence of opinion in one point: each allows that (*next to it's own,*) the Clergy of the Church of England, since it's reformation from Popery, have been most eminently distinguished

guished for *their valuable improvements in Scripture-knowledge.*

That in a system received *in toto*, about two centuries and half ago, no lucky concurrence of circumstances should since have happened, that has afforded to a succession of fearless, or more cautious governments, the probable chance, that any approach to a more complete reformation would meet with a general acquiescence, appears unaccountable, without much reflection. The spirit displayed at it's commencement gloriously accomplished wonders. It promised perseverance, as well in attention to future *improvement*, as in adherence to all sound principles. What it was that suddenly checked, and has since counteracted this generous spirit, you will not fail to understand perfectly, upon serious meditation. This has been a subject of painful speculation to many worthy men, friends indeed to Calvin, to Luther, but more friends to Truth. These have commonly agreed to seek the only relief under it, that readily occurred to those who were, least of all, friends to Contention, in a

Latitude

Latitude of Subscription to Forms and Articles, (confessedly human,) so far only as the mode of interpreting them was allowed to be conformable to the word of God.

Dull falls and harmless to the ground the ponderous charge of Heresy, when hurled by the spirit of Party at the heads of such men, as these Latitudinarians, the truest and most quick-sighted promoters of the true glory of our establishment. The purpose of a Hales, a Chillingworth, a Burnet, a Tillotson, a Clarke, a Hoadley, a Clayton, a Watson, in countenancing this mode of pacifying the consciences of scrupulous members of it, was certainly to divert from the church a source of endless strife, destructive of all fraternal amity. Being Christians in thought and deed, as well as in word, they claim our respect, as lovers of that "*peace of God, which passeth all understanding* *," whether by these words be signified that meekness of piety, of which no idea can be conveyed to the mind of that man

Phil. iv. 7
who

who has not felt it ; or that harmony and unity of friendly affections, without which all understanding and knowledge are, in the sight of God, of little worth.

When such men venture thus to pacify the tender consciences of those brethren who wish to abide in conformity with a church, the slight imperfections of which they cannot fail to see ; when they fairly and openly express their approbation of the claim, which all men capable of reflection, in heart require, of a latitude of interpretation in their assent to it's doctrines, forms and discipline ; how can we set their amiable conduct in a more proper light, than by placing it in contrast with that of their factious revilers ? With what “ *sanctified bitterness*,” as Milton terms it, do these graceless zealots condemn, as “ *a foul apostacy from Christianity*,” that purity of actuating principle, that best evinces the spirit of the gospel ? How invidiously do they ascribe to the meanest motives the conciliatory professions of these genuine sons of Peace ? Can the Latitudinarian's modest assertion of a claim, obviously inauspicious to his

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secular

secular views, have any other purpose than that of discharging honestly a duty to which his soul impels him, with a generous disdain of the craft (however countenanced) of base ambition? The worst that Malice itself can say of him is, that he mistakes the temper of the Church he seeks to vindicate. Yet surely in one supposition he is not mistaken, that no Protestant church can pretend to consistency, if, whilst it repels that claim, it continues to maintain its original principle of “* standing fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ, our only Lord and Master, hath made us free.” He may justly presume, that in renouncing Popery, it renounced all pretension to absolute infallibility. When it argued so irresistibly against the tenet of the Church of Rome, that it is never in the wrong, did it retain in its own favour the assertion, that itself is always in the right? Does it thus justify its abiding to this day inflexible in the same preposterous resolution, to exclude or quell, as far without and within its own proper verge,

* Gal. v. 1.

as it's influence or power can stretch, all diversity of opinion?

That such is not the present temper of our church is generally allowed. How then shall we answer the foregoing query? Why are impositions and restraints continued, which could never serve the purposes for which they were decreed? Let us shew more reverence for the wisdom of our superiors, than to suppose the delay of the repeal requested, occasioned by their purpose of enforcing that problematical, or ever questionable uniformity, which the Omnipotent Being, with whom alone, "** that is yet possible, which is impossible with men,*" has never thought fit to effect upon earth. Let us not presume so grossly to affront our Honourable and Right Honourable, Right and Most Reverend Legislators, as to doubt their clear discernment of the glaring incongruity of a decree, obliging, under pains and penalties, the owners of all the clocks of the kingdom to make them strike the hours exactly at the

• Matt. xix. 26.

same instant with that of the Royal Palace. Not a whit more extravagant was the expectation of those, who could dream of preventing a diversity of opinions, by the imposition of Subscriptions, Acts of Uniformity, and Sacramental Tests.

To reconcile, or give a plausible account of this matter, has been attempted various ways, with great ingenuity and learning, and equal inconsistency. Whither shall we turn for a solution of the difficulty? Shall we renounce entirely the liberty of investigating with our own best judgment, the true sense of Scripture, when once admitted within the established fence of reputed orthodoxy; or shall we declare with Bishop Coneybeare *, that "every man's subscription to the thirty-nine Articles amounts to an assent to them in the very sense in which the compilers themselves are supposed to have understood them? Who is not aware of the arduous task of ascertaining precisely what that sense was? It was conveyed

* Sermon upon the Case of Subscription.

in words used by men, who after differing long upon the points, they were intended to decide, agreed at length to close their perplexed debates, and leave that sense purposely indeterminate, by expressing, without exact precision, what they could not bring themselves to understand perfectly alike. To you this will not appear strange, who have considered the many different senses put upon ten thousand passages of scripture, which have seemed to you so plain, that he that runs may read them, who have viewed their countless multitude collected, with all possible brevity, in the five huge Folio Volumes of Poole's Synopsis. Shall we then profess, with Bishop Clayton, that "we do not think the Church requires any other kind of * Subscription, than such as is necessary for the sake of Peace?"—We may, in this case, conceive it to leave opinion free in fact, so far only controlling all discordance in doctrine, as the profession of it threatens danger to the state. No serious apprehension of danger to the safety of the King or his Government,

* Dedication to Essay on Spirit.

was, I believe, ever pretended from the latitude claimed by Bishop Clayton. It was approved, an hundred years ago, by Archbishop Tillotson and Bishop Burnet. It was sanctioned by their joint Sovereigns, William the Third and his Queen, who ordered the two excellent prelates, expressly for the same conciliatory purpose, to draw up the judicious exposition of the Articles, written and published by the latter.

I have dwelt the longer upon what has been severely censured as a species of dissent, which you will find very widely extended among the Conformist Clergy, in the very arguments produced by the admirably acute Author of the Confessional, for a different purpose. He repro-
bated most rudely the use of a Latitude, which tended to supersede the pressing necessity of what he avowed to be the object of his hopeless wish, the removal of Subscriptions altogether. The contest, in due season, will be speedily brought to an issue. In the mean time, let us unite in forming one cordial wish for our Non-
con-

conformist Brethren ; to see them disown, from henceforth their odious representations of the Clergy of our Church, and the terms of our conformity to it ; and consenting at length to be one fold under one shepherd, enjoy that harmony in future with us, which themselves must allow they never did, and probably never will enjoy with one another.

To this benevolent wish it may be imagined that a perpetual bar will be opposed by a vast majority of the Non-conformists, who in character little resemble the candid, worthy, and well-informed Teachers above alluded to. If you should chance, in a private conference, to meet with any of those, who are said to be frequently railing, in their public discourses, at the ecclesiastical authority established in this realm ; you may teach them a lesson of moderation, by civilly desiring them to resolve to you this plain question. Is it from personal experience, or from any just grounds of apprehension, that they utter these complaints ? In either case, the demonstration of their unreasonableness

ness will be no difficult task. The silly habit of complaining without occasion or due reflection, is a sore malady, and sadly epidemical. Remind them of what you may probably have read, the lively expressions of satisfaction and gratitude in some noted publications of the Dissenters, in reply to the ravings of Tory rancour, which burst forth upon the grant of the Act of Toleration; and with what exultation they applaud the saying of a great Minister *, much canvassed at that day, that by that Act, their public worship had obtained all they could ever request for it, a legal establishment. You may easily lower their tone of rude remonstrance, by requesting them to inform you, if they know of any one Dissenter who will declare he has suffered for non-compliance with any condition still imposed by the Act. Their fearful apprehension of any penalty alledged will appear to be mere pretence and cavil. When the enforcement of a statute is well known to be shocking to the humanity and generous spirit of a nation like

* Lord Somers.

this,

this, it is more than obsolete, it is in effect repealed. Their inability to produce a rational apology for their indecent murmurs being thus exposed, they will stand self-convicted.

You will often, after all, in a little promiscuous commerce with the world, have occasion to observe that the Non-conformist clergy are not singular in raising these offensive clamours against the temporal and spiritual tyranny of the church. Expect to hear them thrown out, and with still greater absurdity, by many an injudicious Layman of our own communion, who has learned to repeat, with all the sagacity of a parrot, the party-cant of our civil dissensions. You will not fail to lay open to due contempt the weakness of such rash invectives. Make our traducers sensible that all the incroachments they ignorantly alledge of the power of Churchmen, under the English constitution, entrench as little upon the rights and liberties of the people, as they do upon what we are insolently accused of regarding as the sole object of our adoration, the authority of our earthly sovereign.

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You may thus mildly expostulate with these grumblers—Of what can you reasonably wish to abridge the power of the Church? Limited, as it has been long considered, almost wholly to it's own internal discipline, have you so little knowledge of it's present state, as to pronounce it's administration or exertions, in this respect, extreme or oppressive? Does not the just lamentation of it's best and wisest members witness a deficiency of power in their Rulers to compel the strict observance of some of it's most laudable institutions?—If the idea of a fact so notorious is indeed quite new to them, it will appear they have been taking the liberty of talking familiarly upon a subject of which they have really seen, heard, or thought little or nothing. Let them learn it then from the liberal exposition of a considerate and clear-sighted judge *.

"However jealous the laity may be of ecclesiastical encroachments, though the repetition of them becomes every day

* Vid. Sermon preached at the Consecration of William Lord Bishop of Exeter, by the Rev. Dr. Sturges, Chancellor of the Diocese of Winchester.

less probable, it can never be their interest so to weaken the hands of the governors of the church, as to render them incapable of controlling the conduct of it's ministers, of making them do their duty, and answer the purposes of their appointment, and of removing causes of complaint which come from the laity themselves. It can never be the interest of the people at large so to relax the laws which bind any particular class of men, as to set that class at liberty from it's own obligations, and to defeat the purposes for which it was formed."

Permit me here, my worthy young Brethren, to express my confident assurance, that all who have the duties of their function seriously at heart, will join with the excellent writer just quoted, in regretting the want of sufficient episcopal power to control the inferior Clegy, in the point upon which he most especially insists, that of non-residence. It is with peculiar satisfaction that I take this opportunity of recommending to your earnest attention the example of my most esteemed friend, whose very amiable character and rectitude

rectitude of principles, you will see uniformly impressed throughout all his several truly valuable publications. It is by adopting his temperate and ingenuous mode of defending our established forms and institutions that you will best succeed in silencing the obloquy so often rashly cast upon them. By reproving, with equal justice, the unreasonableness of one party, who contend for their absolute perfection, and that of the other, who revile and reject them, because they have some imperfections, you will evince the necessity of candid acknowledgments on both sides. You will make it appear, on the one hand, that in the Church of England an admirable and most eminently useful provision is made for the instruction and edification of it's members, and their improvement in all the christian graces; and you will freely confess, on the other hand, how far the said forms are merely human, how far therefore they are not, cannot be expected to be absolutely perfect.

Thus, and thus only can the panegy-
rists and traducers of any human establish-
ment

ment whatsoever, civil or ecclesiastical, be ever brought to enter into sober and rational discussion, to live on terms of fair intelligence, or to maintain true Christian charity, one with another. Thus indeed, by a peaceful communication [of experience, knowledge and friendly counsel, mutual improvement and advantage, and the unspeakable satisfaction of a true reconciliation, and fraternal affection, will of course be the happy consequences. In the free conversation of a small company of select friends, mention being made by your Addresser, of the distinguished excellencies of some of our Superior Clergy; upon his observing, that 'there was one divinely attractive grace in particular, Moderation, which endeared their characters to the truly pious and virtuous of every denomination of Christians,' one of the most respected and the best informed of the Independent Dissenting Teachers, immediately subjoined;—"It does so, no doubt, to all, who in naming the name of Christ, are blessed with such a portion of his Spirit, as disengages them entirely from a blind or implicit devotion to any sect

fect or party."—His concurrence in the unreserved applause bestowed upon these worthies, who most truly understood the interest and highest honour of our church, he concluded with this frank confession;—"Were such patterns of the genuine temper of the Gospel generally copied by Churchmen, the cause of Non-conformity must be given up by men of sense and principle."

CHAP.

CHAPTER IV.

Expostulation with Infidels.

SECTION I.

The Libertine Scoffer.

IT may be questioned whether the method recommended as best adapted to conciliate the opponents to our religious worship and professions, can, without a striking impropriety, be applied to the determined adversaries and deriders of all religion, natural and revealed. You may be told that Moderation here is out of place, Candour quite preposterous, nay common Charity itself is inexcusable: that a tame indurance of such insults, without indignation, is not reputable in a Clergyman,
much

much less can it be approved, by any but a lukewarm Christian, of the Laodicean cast, old or new. I hear the incensed Polemic exclaim with vehemence :—" The conduct is pitiful, is dastardly. Strange weakness, to think of correcting a vice of enormity by sober argument, and *calm expostulation* ! It is not weakness merely, it is betraying a tendency to apostatize from the sacred cause."

Aware of the taunting rebuke, which the staunch Controvertist is wont to cast upon the courtly Divine, the placid Orator, who censures with serenity the most pernicious tenets, the most flagitious crimes, you will, I trust, find your humble Adviser as earnest a reprover of Libertinism and Infidelity, and as little inclined to soften or restrain your declared abhorrence of such atrocious depravities, as those, who kindling fiercer and fiercer as they rave, arraign them in terms of keener reproach. Our end, you know, is not to confound, but to convince, not to provoke, but to reclaim, for which it is first requisite to obtain a patient hearing. With a steadiness of zeal, the less variable,
for

for it's not being ardent overmuch, you will not experience the general regret, that awaits the issue of a fiery contest, ill adapted to usher in the saving truths, or reconcile your adverse party to the precepts of your meek Redeemer. Let nothing check your due reprehension of impiety, with all that energy of speech, with which the cause of God will not fail to inspire you, upon every emergency, where it may be enforced with any prospect of success. This lucky juncture will seldom occur, in your casual intercourse with these insolent scoffers, apostates alike from all good principles, moral and religious. As in their company you must always be prepared to expect a repetition of the same profane insults to decency and good sense, you will therefore shun, without a pressing call of duty, to incur such painful shocks to your pious feelings. Against these let them vent their mockery among themselves, upon whose callous hearts your use of the like weapons, your attempts, which Solomon, in some cases, thought right, to "answer a fool, according to his folly," will rarely take effect.

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At their mad sport they are always sure to be most expert.

SECTION II.

The Atheist.

LET us now suppose the favourable opportunity presented for the feeble voice of mortal man to reach the heart of the dauntless Atheist, who disdains allegiance to the living God. His torpid conscience may be roused to some sense of his guilt, by a signal calamity, the salutary stroke of a severe discipline. This may dispose it to attend to your *reason*, and exert his own. Exhort, encourage him then, first, to make a right use of this inestimable privilege of his nature. Engage his heart to make an intimate application of it an object of the deepest concern. An internal feeling of what it is that constitutes the highest dignity of man can never be a matter of indifference to a rational being. Induce him to cast an observant eye

eye upon the various characters of animated creatures round him. He beholds all their inferior tribes endued with an active instinct. He sees it's effects, he discerns it's invariable purposes. He views them constantly obedient to the call of some corporeal want, or instigated by some brutal appetite, the gratification or supply of which is necessary to preserve the living individual, or to perpetuate the species. From this general survey of the subordinate ranks of sentient beings, lead him next to turn inward on himself an eye of reflection. Excite him to contemplate the wonders of that intelligent principle within him, of which your present address to it enforces an immediate sense. Let it inspirit him with a novel wish to improve, to enjoy this noblest property of man, that qualifies him for the rapturous acquisition of knowledge. Shew him how it will carry him on, without ceasing, to fresh discoveries of boundless wisdom, power, beneficence, disposed with infinite variety throughout the whole creation, will raise his mind with increasing transports of gratitude, to the

acknowledgment, praise and adoration of
it's All-perfect Author.

Does he profess that the universal voice
of Nature, which you say is gone out
unto the ends of the world, proclaiming the
glory of God, has never reached his ear,
has never touched his heart ; that the en-
tering at all upon this sublime knowledge
is equally denied to men and brutes. In-
stead of combating directly the falsehood,
the phrenzy of this degrading hypothesis,
you will allow that to man, perhaps the
lowest of all intelligent creatures, but an
imperfect glimpse is vouchsafed of these
grand objects of spiritual delight. But
you will add that the pupil of Supreme
Wisdom, in this his infant state of disci-
pline, is blessed with a capacity of rising
in the scale of beings, by an ardent appli-
cation of his heart and mind, in adoring
the visible traces of the divine wisdom in
the universe, as high above the undevout
spectators of them, as that dull disparager
of the human character affects, in fact,
to sink himself below the vilest reptile.
By a strange perversion of the most ex-
cellent

cellent faculties of his soul, he can resist the clearest evidence of super-eminent wisdom, power, goodness, displayed even in the construction, animation, and spontaneous motions of the meanest insect. But how unnatural is the state of the rational mind, that rejects, disdains the slightest impression of that transcendent display of all the glorious attributes of the Deity, enforced upon it, from the formation of beings endued with intellectual and moral faculties?

Prepare yourselves here to endure the abrupt interruption of your unprincipled antagonist. Most arrogant will be his usual vaunt of humility.—“He derides these high-flown conceits, arising from a proud pretension to superior faculties, which man possesses not, neither does he want. No reluctance has he to put himself upon a level with creatures, who enjoy the good things of this life, without racking their brains with empty notions, which the bigotry of the stupid vulgar, the jargon of crazy pedants, the imposture of priests, in league with wily statesmen, have propagated merely for the purpose
of

of holding the souls of men in perpetual servitude. No such control will he brook upon his thoughts or actions, nor will he deign to make a specious shew of adoration, paid to a vain chimera, a mere notion, confessedly incomprehensible, and teeming with contradictions without number, no object of sight, of knowledge, the faintest idea of which is more manifestly denied to human reason than to brutal instinct."—Will his profane temerity stop here? No. He has caught, it seems, a smattering of the Atheistic Lore, antique and modern. He may proceed with Epicurus, or his more extravagant panegyrist Lucretius, (for the Master had not the shameless audacity of the Scholar,) "to claim celestial honours for his prowess, in ridding mankind of an enslaving dread of the visionary tyrant, to whom are said to belong the issues of life and death, and of all that appertains to either,—"

The futility of this ostentation of a dauntless courage, which his shrinking soul, at the very time, is inwardly belying, you may readily expose to his own self-contempt, by an immediate appeal to the quick

quick and present feelings of his own heart. The vaunt itself unwittingly betrays his fears. The God, to whom we look up with devout resignation, with faith, with love, with gratitude and boundless hope, is evidently to him an object of ceaseless terror. Press this appeal, with a steady attention, home to his bosom. It will infallibly, whether he owns it or not, awaken a conviction there, which the very fiends themselves, who believe and tremble, dare not disavow. Internally confounded, at the moment of his mock-triumph over the dread of divine justice, he will start at the brand of Cain, visibly stamped upon his countenance, in the mirror, which his slighted monitor Conscience is silently holding up to his affrighted contemplation. How bitterly do the pangs of remorse now dash all his sensual pleasures! Bestial sensuality!—Is it in pursuit of thee that he flies off, with aversion, from the most permanent source of perfection, of felicity, that a rational being is capable of enjoying?

If your friendly expostulation, proceeding from a fulness of heart, inspirited with
com-

compassion and goodwill towards man, instead of obtaining some credit for the sincerity of your devotion towards God, should only provoke the fury of your sarcastic railer the more; restrain for the present your indignation at this unworthy treatment. Redouble your pity for his fatal delusion. Regard it as the natural consequence of his frantic passion. Expect not any thing, in the least degree correspondent to your pious emotions, discernible in his mind. He stiles them accordingly, what he really believes them to be, hypocritical grimace. Such he well knows they must evidently be, if exhibited in his own character, as incompatible with yours as light with darkness. Your failure of success upon a heart so ill disposed as yet to receive any religious impression, will of course be discouraging. Nevertheless, do not yet cease to persevere in evincing the reality of your good wishes towards him. Compel him to feel that your professions are manifestly clear of all dissimulation or false pretence. Let the irresolute and wavering Christian shrink hopeless from the task, whilst you, more uniformly guided by the clear and steady

steady light of the gospel, perceive you are advancing in the right way to overcome your greatest difficulty. In a heart hitherto insensible you have raised a degree of emotion. In a mind habitually averse from serious thinking you have obtained a moment's attention to it's most important concern. By the dignity of truth attempered with benevolence, you have somewhat over-awed his insolent airs of mockery. An easier admission may from hence be gained of an immediate address to his *understanding*.

In this it is that he is vain enough to fancy his main superiority of strength to lie. What use he has ever made of it, in respect to his eternal interests, he will find it hard to say. You have drawn him, with the cords of humanity, to an amicable conference and trial of it's strength. Entreat him ingenuously to put the following query to his internal Oracle.—Is it indeed from the result of profound speculation, (so these mock-philosophers are pleased to stile the ravings of an ungo-

* Hosea xi. 4.

verned fancy,) is it from observation and reflection that he has made this mighty discovery, that the immensity, order, harmony, beauty of the universe, bears no relation to an Almighty Author, have no dependence on the supreme goodness, the boundless wisdom of his Providence? In that case, the discerning faculty, or the inventive property of his understanding being so widely different from that which you possess, you request him to inform you, in what manner he has arrived at this clear conviction, that either he, or any of the ignorant and powerless beings around him, animate or inanimate, has been his own Creator, or the First Cause of existence to himself and them: or that he, and all their several genera and species have derived it, in eternal succession, one from another. Can he open his eyes, and behold, unconvinced of the comparative impotence of himself and his fellow-mortals, the divine energy displayed in the most obvious appearances in nature? Can he raise them to the heavenly luminaries, and after one instant of reflection, ascribe the enlivening influence of the sun, the regular and undisturbed

disturbed revolutions of the planets, to their own independent and voluntary agency? Will the most determined infidel unreclaimed, contemplate his own fearfully constructed frame? Will he presume to declare it questionable whether he is not indebted to his own sagacity alone for all the various operations of it's animal œconomy, it's muscular motion, digestion, the formation, circulation, and incessantly fresh supply of it's vital fluids? The mysterious laws which govern these, though adapted to excite his grateful wonder, has his utmost application been ever yet able to trace?

His weak attempts at an answer here, if conscious of a train of palpable inconsistencies, involved in a maze of inextricable confusion, he dares persist in adventuring any, will infallibly make his defeat conspicuous to himself. A demonstrative proof of the necessary existence of an eternal all-perfect First Cause, requires fewer præcognita, to be convinced of it's truth, than any other truth whatsoever, unless it be that of his own existence. But a
capacity

capacity for some serious attention must certainly concur with a sincere inclination to comprehend it. You will, of course, proceed to lay before him, in their full and strong light, the plain arguments, which cannot fail to be always intimately present to your own minds, though probably new to one, utterly unacquainted with Cudworth, Clarke, Wollaston, or any of the many approved writers, who have established this truth most clearly and beyond dispute*. You may thus reduce him to an indispensable alternative, either to maintain an absurdity, now pal-

* May I be permitted to add, that (for a ready consultation at his leisure, and to fix perpetually in his mind an idea, of the being and attributes, and particularly the unity of God, which once well impressed, will never after be called in question,) you may possibly think proper to recommend the first Section of the "Evidence of Reason, in proof of the Immortality of the Soul." This evidence, being independent on abstruse metaphysical inquiries, will be the less repulsive to his consideration. It was collected with very great, though pleasing labour, by your Addresser, about 20 years ago, from indigested parcels left confusedly in manuscript, by Mr. A. Baxter, and is sold by Messrs. Cadell and Davies.

pable

pable to himself, or to renounce all future pretension to defend his principles.

His foolish heart, thus probed, may next be gently interrogated, to what end he sought to disprove what Reason and Conscience, his divinely appointed guides, so forcibly inculcate. However reluctant, induce him to examine what could impel it to deny, that it is to an invifible Creator of infinite wisdom and goodness, that he must necessarily recur, for his being and well being. Could it be for the purpose of establishing his happiness, or exalting his nature, that he starts aside from his only solid ground of hope, of confidence, his perpetual dependence upon one Almighty Father, Protector, Friend? Is he sure, after all, that it is not his own fault, if he feels no sympathy in the rapturous delight, which we profess to feel, which we glory in cherishing, when we contemplate, in our supremely gracious and wise Creator, the just, the merciful Arbiter of our future destiny? When he beholds us ardently aspiring to raise our best affections towards him to the highest pitch of love, of hope, of gratitude and filial

filial reverence, will he seriously engage to justify that undissembled scorn, or insulting pity for our illusion, that he is wont to express?

This reiterated appeal to his internal feelings, as it may strike a keen reproach, afflictive to a sore conscience, may perchance exasperate him to persist the more in his usual reply. To soothe a pride, which the very mildness of your expostulation may perhaps have mortified, as arguing a slight opinion of his mental prowess, he may not scruple to say,—
 “This delight, these raptures, where they are not silly affectation, or subtle hypocrisy, have been always regarded as the mere phrenzy of enthusiasm, by us who know the *world*. It’s manners, to which we all are most religiously bound to conform, except those whom these strange fits disqualify from living longer in it, it’s maxims properly adapted to those manners that gave them birth, these, these are my sole rules of action. Instead of dreaming that I can hold an intercourse with your unseen Controller of all things below, residing above the clouds, instead of suing to
 his

his Providence to speed the due management of my concerns, I am better satisfied myself with my own sagacious observation of what passes abroad among mankind, whom you have studied only in books; I am persuaded to believe that all * things come alike to all.—Does not your wise King of Israel, who knew the world better than all his priests, say just the same? Instead of lifting up, on vacancy, a distracted eye, full of wild transport, or agonizing fear, I am content to abide with patience the caprices of fortune, whom my senses, my experience, the speeches and actions, the pleasures and sufferings, the prosperity and adversity of all around me, proclaim to be the blind, yet sovereign arbitress of all the lucky or untoward events upon earth. To her wayward humours I submit, wherever I find I cannot control them by my own skill.”—

You will deplore his subtlety in perverting the plain sense of the Royal Preacher, who just before had said; “† I

* Eccles. ix. 2.

† Ib. viii. 12.

surely

surely know it shall be well with them that fear God ; but it shall not be well with the wicked."—Advert more closely to the wretched self-condemning subterfuge of this hypocrite in folly and profaneness, who dares thus say with his lips, but not in his heart, " There is no God." It is plain he only puts on a false appearance of Atheism, to keep his disgraced and humbled arrogance in countenance. What other motive can he have, who extols thus highly his own sagacity and superior knowledge, when he is so pertinacious in ascribing to blind Chance, the formation, the universal government of this miraculous frame of nature, nay of that exquisitely complex *machine*, his own soul? This indeed he calls not Spirit, but Matter, unaccountably modified, and incomprehensibly endowed with those ennobling faculties of invention, thought and reason. Will he assert that these astonishing effects of some unseen plastic Agent, some senseless, yet self-moving Power, have been all produced by mere accident, without any wise, just, or beneficent purpose? Is he not then of course compelled to renounce all pretence to
any

any portion of these qualities himself? How can he maintain a claim, in his own character, to the least degree of reason or goodness, relative or absolute, when he disowns all property or attribute of the kind to belong to that sole object of his adoration, Fortune, of whom, unknowing and unknown, he familiarly talks, as his particular acquaintance, who unwittingly gave him life, perception, apprehension, judgment, with that freedom of will, that spontaneity of action, of utterance, which at this moment he is so unnaturally perverting?

If having got some inkling of the craft of the ancient Sophists, or rather of their apish, and far less rational mimicks of modern days, it should admonish him here to shift the mask, he will now seek to disguise his untenable hypothesis under a more specious fallacy.—“It is not, he will next alledge, to the necessary existence of a God that I mean to object. I shall not arraign his wisdom, which you call unerring, ineffable, uncircumscribed, unsearchable. It is not his power, which you call infinite, uncontrollable, that I

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presume

presume to question. These attributes, of which your indeterminate negatives only express your want of all precise idea, or, properly speaking, your utter ignorance, I should waste my breath most idly in disputing. No; the belief alone, which I still persist in disclaiming, is that of his constant superintendence, and government of all the events and consequences, great and small, in the natural and moral world. I accordingly challenge you to reconcile the several phenomena of evils manifold and prevalent in both, with your notion of his boundless goodness and perfect justice." —

To a peremptory challenger of this sort, this candid, if not definitive reply may be appositely returned. It is confessed that to unenlightened reason, in this imperfect state of our faculties, no complete solution is vouchsafed us of these perplexing appearances of error, vice, disorder, and misery. But a blessed revelation from God, by us joyfully embraced, though by him slighted and renounced, discloses to a certain degree their mysterious tendency, and lightens, if it does not
entirely

entirely dispel the gloom. Even in this uninformed, this infant state of our existence, the pious heart, the docile understanding, are happily adapted to discern innumerable indications of a benign overruling Providence, competent to afford us a firm conviction, that in this permission of transient evil, the promotion and establishment of some permanent good is invariably attended to by the Supreme Disposer. Every advance we are daily making in the study of the most untoward phenomena in the natural world, produces to us fresh tokens of this boundless benignity.—“ You escape not so, he abruptly exclaims : Attend to the main stress of my objection. You may tell me of order springing up from confusion, harmony from discord, in the *natural* world. In the *moral*, there is no such regular compensation. Where upon earth am I to seek for your boasted continual display of impartial goodness, or equal justice?”—

Not upon earth, it is granted, where this prime fundamental law, that virtue is ordained to be productive of happiness,

vice of misery, is so frequently counteracted. Our weak unassisted Reason is here at a stand. It seeks in vain to solve the difficulty. Impenetrable obscurity rests upon it. A divine revelation can afford us hope of clearing it up in a future period of our existence. To that, it assures us, every thing in the present scene bears a determinate relation.—“To me, he cries, this notion is a mere *gratis dictum*. By what argument, what analogy, what testimony contradictory to my senses, is any such relation, any such result in another life to be rendered credible? To me all things manifestly proclaim that no such regular account is taken of the doings of us mortals here.”—Is this, you will ask him, quite so manifest as he boldly declares? What is it that affords him absolute security for the truth of the dreadfully hazardous presumptions, upon which he is obstinately bent to rely? Upon what proof does he rest his confidence, that of all his doings, or these his irreverent speeches, God takes no account?—That the good-will or the displeasure of this Almighty Lord of earth and heaven are equally matters of utter
indif-

indifference to him :—That it is no more his interest, than his duty, to submit his wayward will to the laws of eternal wisdom and justice ?

To the forcible drift of the last query he will oppose the deadening counter-check of invincible ignorance.—“ How is it possible for man to know the will of God ? How can I be sure whether all that is preached about the natural impression of a divine law of righteousness, written upon the heart of man, which some of you are pleased to call a *moral sense*, and of which mine has no perception, be not altogether an artful fiction ? ”

—After expressing your wonder at his extreme self-abasement, in thus disowning his possession of the faculty of discerning right from wrong, at his strange dissent from the late proud claim of supereminent sagacity, you will induce him gradually, by proper interrogatories, to acknowledge that he has really a sense of certain qualities in the rational agents, of various descriptions, that fall under his notice, which from their beneficent nature, never fail to meet his approbation,

independent of their immediate effects upon himself; that he has likewise the idea of contrary qualities, as constantly exciting his aversion from their malignant tendency, though they do not concern him in particular. Is not this precisely the very idea, of which he declares he has no perception? Thus then, however stubbornly he may contest it, the constitution of his own heart and mind stands confessedly against him. Who was it that originally established that constitution? Who is it that uniformly maintains it still? Who but his Almighty Author, whose hand, whose will is thus made visible, impressing there his sovereign law in characters indelible? Should this mode of expostulation incline him to cast an eye upon an object most strange, nay, possibly altogether new to him, the internal workings of his own mind, he may there contemplate, with a salutary shock, the desperate rashness of his principles and conduct, nakedly exposed.

SECTION III.

The Deist.

IF you shall have happily awakened in the conscience of the Contemner of Natural Religion, a quick sense of his utter inability to disown his immediate and perpetual dependance upon God, for all the good he can enjoy or hope for, you may congratulate him upon his returning reason with a *secret* satisfaction. Discreetly tempered let it be, lest any apparent air of triumph, of conscious superiority in your understanding, or ascendant over his, should gall his vanity, betray your own, and drive him back into a fresh paroxysm of phrenzy, an incident too frequent in all conferences with these gentry. Expect soon to see him ready again to change his vizer, and renew his attack upon your pious principles in another

ther shape. A momentary shame attendant upon his ungracious declining farther contest, for the present, upon the most essential point, may incite him to divert your attention awhile from *himself*, the sole favourite object of his own regard.

“ In return for my frank exposure of my principles to your severe scrutiny, do you as plainly set before me a fair and full declaration of your opposite sentiments. My inspection of them, I promise you, shall be as accurate and impartial as that you have bestowed on mine. Their sincerity, their scope, their consequences, I engage, from your example, to bring to a rigorous trial.” This courteous challenge you will accept with complacency, even though you perceive he hopes to find you (as infidels are wont to describe all churchmen,) a fierce bully in attack, an arrant coward in defence. You will answer it with a serene, but resolute spirit, having duly anticipated his intended cavils. Like the first Apostles of the glad tidings of the Gospel, you will have no call here to preme-

premeditate. ‘ * For it shall be given you, in the same hour, what ye shall speak,’ says your Blessed Lord. Let your unreserved simplicity and seriousness in declaring your principles be such as sacred truth demands. This will strike him with an involuntary awe, an unforeseen conviction, that ‘ it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.’ Thus only can you properly obviate his meditated charge of hypocritical pretence. Consider it as an indispensable point, that you should persuade him, it is not from an implicit submission to the authority of man, from an interested or stupid reverence for the assumed infallibility of a pontiff, a council, a church, a synod, that you derive your faith, but from a noble free-thinking, more sedulously far, and earnestly pursued, than any which he appears to have bestowed upon the subject.

You will then solemnly protest, and your inmost soul, it may be hoped, will strictly correspond with the protestation :

* Mark xiii. 11.

That

That in forming and establishing your religious principles, you keep always present to your mind an All-righteous Judge and Sovereign Ruler of your destiny, to whom you esteem yourselves accountable for the use you make of those excellent faculties he has deigned to confer upon you, of intelligence, liberty, and moral agency :—You will assert that Conscience, an inherent governing principle, which manifestly derives it's office and authority from a divine origin, is an essential property of a rational soul, perpetually discerns, and forcibly inculcates to your mind the difference of good and evil, right and wrong :—That this impartial delegate within approves your observance of the divine law written in your hearts, or condemns your slightest temptation to transgress it.—That accordingly 'the Spirit of God beareth witness with your spirit,' rendering it tranquil and serene, or confounded and terrified.—You will affirm that your faith in Christ greatly strengthens that natural principle, and renders more clear and steady the dim twinkling light of Reason, ever duly attentive, and devoutly subservient to it, establishing

establiſhing the ſanction of both inviolably to the certainty of your perpetual dependance upon the will of One All-Dispoſing Deity, directing all your hopes to Him, for the iſſue of your moſt ſagely planned undertakings, your deareſt concerns in life, it's preſent and future welfare.—This dependance you will maintain to be not only the neceſſary condition of your being, but it's moſt exalted privilege, and your ſole ſecurity for it's continuance.—May a double portion of it's grace enable you to add, that the very ſhort duration of this life, with all the train of ills attendant on it, is contemplated by you, not with reſignation only, but with fervent gratitude, as your certain pledge from heaven, that ſtamps an authentic ſanction to your faith, exalting to aſſurance your inſpiring hope of your future deſtiny to approach more and more nearly to the knowledge of that Eternal Source of Blifs, whom you here adore, though unſeen to mortal optics, yet with perfect confidence.—That faith alone, which he ſo wantonly derides, is your deliverer from the “* bondage through which he is all his life-

* Heb. ii. 15.

time subject to the King of Terrors;" under which he groans in secret, at the first disorder of a feverish pulse. Amidst the pangs of a distempered mind and body, " * midst upper, nether and surrounding " darkness, without one gleam of comfort, it presents him instantly with the direst object of his apprehension, *Death*.—This harbinger of the faithful Christian to the mansions of everlasting glory and perfection invites you cheerfully to quit this vale of sorrows, empowers your uplifted eye, through all it's checquered scenes, the more stedfastly to behold the light of his paternal countenance, which from your first dawn of reason, has constantly attended your hopeful progress to the " † kingdom prepared for his children, from the foundation of the world."—

Should a rude and sudden burst of railery interrupt the profession you are making of your faith in the religion of Christ, at his express requisition, regardless of the insult, you will still persist in treating him as that Divine Instructor himself, upon

* Milton.

† Matt. xxv. 34.

earth,

earth, treated his most obstinately blind gainfayers. Compassionate even his wilful want of sight. Invite him to resume the use of it, in view of infinitely important truth. Present, in contrast, to his eyes the fatal source of his unhappy prejudice against it. Ask him, how he endures to face the horrors that await him, in that “* darkness visible, serving only to discover sights of woe,” into which his ungodly passions hurry him, merely for the purpose of shunning that heavenly light. Reclaim him to it, in a mode that may least offend a vanity, over which you will not easily teach him to obtain the mastery, by imputing his aversion to the Gospel, as in justice you possibly may, in some degree, to the wretched misconceptions of it's real nature and essence, which he may have caught from misguiding teachers, who have long disguised, and are still wofully disgracing it's genuine beauty.

In order to lead him gently into the way to instruct himself, desire him to give you a dispassionate answer to the following

* Milton.

Queries;

Queries ;—Does it derogate in the least, from the reverential notions which he must at length, upon solid grounds, and serious reflection, be led to entertain of the Deity, to acknowledge him as the prime Author of the most comfortable tidings, that ever revived expiring hope and joy in the dejected heart of man? What has been the result of the subtlest arts of sophistry, the keenest shafts of wit, maliciously pointed against them, since their first promulgation? Has it not been the constant triumph of Divine Truth, not only over the virulent attacks of it's open foes, but especially over the more injurious misreport of it's pretended friends? Has it not maintained it's ground with a strength and splendor still encreasing from every *providential* detection of many gross misrepresentations of it's genuine doctrines, by it's frantic or treacherous assailants? What you may here stile *providential*, he will, upon this, as upon all other occasions, rather chuse to call a *natural* series of events. Be it so, never dispute with him about the word. He only means to display his profound sagacity in tracing, however imperfectly, the operation

operation of certain *Second Causes*, which you will declare the wisdom of a *Prime Superintendant* directs, in the promotion of these blessed effects.

Inquire if it can have escaped a knowledge so extensive, that never in the history of mankind did so peculiarly critical a season occur for a signal interposition of Providence, as when the Gospel was first published. Will he attempt to dispute, what he must have seen unquestionably attested, in every page of the records of that important æra, that most generally prevalent throughout all the polished parts of the gentile world, was the contagion of a false philosophy, and the same sceptical, epicurean, or atheistical principles, which a rabble of tyrannical demagogues, for the execution of the destructive purposes of their mad ambition, are instilling into the hearts of our insatuated neighbours at this day? He must know that so gross was the ignorance, in which the ruder nations had lain, for ages far beyond all human register, that a total defection from all virtuous principle was almost universal

sal amongst them : All ideas of a Divine Providence, of a future state of retribution, of the moral benefits of a cordial worship of the Deity, as a righteous Law-giver and Judge, were so generally renounced, that no perceptible traces of them were left.

Within the limits indeed of one obscure corner of the globe yet faintly glimmered the light of a divine revelation, with the professed belief of one true God, the sole Creator of all things. Yet how irreverent, how derogatory were the conceptions, which the degenerate, and wretchedly corrupted Israelites then entertained of the moral attributes of the Deity, and the spiritual purpose of his laws. Like the heretical, I mean the party-spirited sectaries, as well within, as without the pale of every Church that calls itself Christian, they confined within their own narrow circle, all the graces and good-will of that common Father of the Universe, who clothes the lilies of the field, who feedeth the fowls of the air, who sustains and animates the whole frame of nature. But what was greatly worse, they rendered his sacred ordinances

ordinances of no effect. They presumed that by the external observance merely of certain rites and ceremonies, or the bare profession of an implicit faith in the divine authority of a law, the moral tendency of which they totally disregarded, they became secure from all effects of his displeasure. At the same time, their own historians concur with the best contemporary writers of the pagan world, in declaring they surpassed in wickedness, what they were pleased to call the most civilized, as well as the most barbarous nations upon earth. They abandoned themselves to the most sordid especially, and the most odious crimes, that disgraced those very gentiles, who made the most abominable of their vices the objects of their religious worship.

When all mankind was fallen into this woful state of degeneracy, by rejecting the belief or grossly disparaging the character of a Supreme Controller above them, an Arbiter of the destiny of his whole Creation, why should it be thought a thing incredible with him, that the same Divine Power, who in the beginning bade

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order

order, harmony, a world, spring out of confusion, discord, and a chaos, should then bid the light of the gospel to arise over a benighted world?—Is it unbecoming the attributes of the beneficent Creator, to redeem his creatures from these extremes of sin and misery, to condescend to set their eternal interests, their duties, the consequences of their transgression, or observance of them, full in their view, by an extraordinary revelation?—Is it injurious to the character of the merciful Father of the Universe, to believe, that having neither ordained, nor adapted this earth to be the abode of complete satisfaction to an intelligent mind, nor of complete moral perfection, in beings of such limited faculties, and consequently so weak, and liable to err, he has opened to his offending children, if sincerely penitent, the prospect of reconciliation, peace and favour; that he has exalted the lowly natures of the well-disposed and faithful, even in this state of trial, to the rapturous assurance of admission, after death, into a life of permanent purity, dignity and happiness in a world to come?—In what system of human invention

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can he trace, what this divine revelation alone recommends, and establishes by the most awful sanctions, the reasonable homage and service, required by the righteous Lord of all; our due performance of which, in spirit and in truth, will secure to us his constant favour, and our endless felicity?—Of this homage and service, so commonly misunderstood, yet so perfectly intelligible to those, who are prepared “to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child,” has he ever applied his mind to form one clear and distinct idea, obvious indeed to that simplicity and undissembling openness of heart, so distinguishable in undesigned childhood, but strangely warped, or assumed only for a purpose of deceit, by the worldly-minded man?—To comprehend the sum and substance of the religion of Christ, has he consulted the sacred records themselves of our Divine Instructor’s life and doctrines?—Does he not deduce his vague and contemptuous opinion of it from the comments, practical or speculative, exhibited in the immoral conduct or irrational tenets of this or that sect of misguided Christians, at this, or some

former period?—Has he yet to learn that the observance of merely external rights, the belief of doctrines abstracted, and remote from human life, do really constitute no part of it; though superstition venerates, and infidelity derides these alone, as the essence of all religion?—Has he ever understood, what as propounded by our Lord himself to the simple and illiterate, was perfectly plain, and most joyfully embraced, at first hearing, though soon after dismally perplexed by the perverse ingenuity of learned and crafty wranglers, that the vital principle of love to God and man is the sole qualification required for the attainment of eternal life?—Is it of this most gracious, most inspiriting display of the divine mercy, in founding upon that single principle the only acceptable, only rational, yet most animating system of worship due to the kind Father of all, that he presumes to make the subject of his unnatural mockery?

It is not, after all, it cannot be against this comprehensive principle, this vital essence of all true religion, thus clearly exhibited,

exhibited, that the infidel ventures to direct his impotent raillery. He knows his insidious and covert plan of attack is defeated, at the instant it is exposed to the face of day. All here, on the contrary, is open to the light, accessible to all, but the children of darkness, of insatuated bigotry, or hardened guilt. It is through the dim and intricate maze of polemical theology, where the combatants, on either side, avowedly see nothing at all, where much mischief, and no good, is ever found or sought for, that he winds, unperceived, his serpentine approaches. There he may securely dart his sting, without fear of missing the obvious butts of his envenomed ridicule, while through their sides he fondly dreams he deals a deadly stroke at the everlasting gospel. It is not heaven-descended Truth, which these furious combatants are aiming either to overthrow or establish. These are labouring only to demolish every system of religion, which is not of their adoption, with one purpose alone, in order to set up each his own, extracted, as they pretend, from the word of God, upon the

the authority of interpreters, who regard as little as they do themselves, the true spirit of the holy Scripture. The enemies of all religion, on the other hand, rejoice at the conflict of these adverse troops of embattled Nonsense, which do their work far more effectually than they could ever do it themselves. The most important doctrines of our Divine Teacher have nothing to do with these disputes. These doctrines, when pure and unsophisticated, as delivered by our Lord himself, you will find it always easy to defend against the scoffs and rage of Infidelity. Sanctioned as they were by an authority, with which never man before had spoken, they enlightened, they enlarged the uninformed, but upright minds of his faithful followers, with clearer conceptions of their duty, and raised their hopes of their future destiny to a more exalted height of joyful confidence than the most renowned sages of antiquity had ever entertained.

What says the unbelieving Scoffer to this astonishing fact? Will he say that the

the impresson made on their weak minds must have been slight indeed, since at the critical juncture, that brought on the awful event that was ordained to set a seal to his ministry, "they all forsook him and fled?" You may here convict your opponent of disingenuity, or wilful ignorance, in not acknowledging the visible agency of a Supernatural Power, in the sequel of the general apostacy alledged, that directly militates against the argument that he deduces from it. The Saviour of mankind foretold this their speedy defection, even at the moment when their honest hearts were pouring forth their protestations of an everlasting fidelity. Mistaken men! In this resolution they sincerely trusted to persevere. But he, who saw more clearly into their hearts than they did themselves, foresaw, at the same time, how soon his resurrection, predicted indeed by him, but apparently not then understood by them, would reclaim and exalt them above the reproachful frailties of their nature. Triumphant over their unbelief and prejudice, their doubts and fears, their attachment to this world, to life itself, they sacrifice them

them all undaunted, in attestation of an event, so lately deemed incredible. How remote from all human apprehension was their victory, first over themselves. Even there the operation of a power far exceeding that of mortal man is manifestly displayed. More wonderful still was their success, in a firmly contested opposition to the religion professed in their own country, of divine institution, acknowledged to have been such by the Christians themselves, who evinced how grossly the Jews, their rulers especially, had departed from the true spirit of it. But most of all stupendous was their peremptory condemnation, and signal victory over all the established Superstitions in the known world, by men asserting a divine sanction for their proceedings and tenets, but disclaiming all human authority, and destitute of all the attainments and persuasive graces of a polished education, being trained up in the occupations of the lowest ranks in society; who after enduring, for an appointed term, the most shocking extremes of contempt and wretchedness, accomplished the overthrow of all the most firmly settled, and
 highly

highly venerated establishments of religious worship, in all the civilized regions of the known world, and introduced, in their stead, the adoration of one God, in spirit and in truth, or in a perfect purity of mind and manners. You may well defy the most hardened infidel to regard this miraculous revolution in the character and conduct of persons before so very weak and timid, and the mighty change it wrought in the sentiments and morals of all mankind, as occurrences insignificant, and unworthy of serious contemplation.

When you have awakened the attention of the profane caviller to the evidence, internal and external, of the Christian Revelation, finding himself defeated in his opposition to the moral and substantial part, he may again recur to his ready and convenient refuge; he may seek to shelter himself in the obscurity cast over it in the disgraceful squabbles of Christians amongst themselves.—“ This Revelation, which in your partial view of it you are pleased to represent as so interesting, so edifying, so intelligible to all men,

men, is no revelation to me, nor to any professed Christian but yourself, whom I ever conversed with. Most sparingly, in truth, as they all pretend to expound it, is it vouchsafed to the sons of men. It is only adapted, as far as I can see, or as they seem to think, to lead us into the gloomy maze of mystery, and there to confound and terrify us with the shadows of things unseen, and utterly incomprehensible. You must let me see you first extricated from the maze yourselves, before you shall tempt me to follow you." —

The presumption, you will tell him, of these expounders of what they do not *understand*, is no excuse for his wilful blindness to what he most easily may. Is their mistaking the glad tidings of the gospel of Christ a reasonable plea for his rejecting the portion of clear light, which Heaven in mercy dispenses to his feeble optics, which are here only suited to admit the dawn of everlasting glory? Would he renounce the light of the day because it shines but faintly in the twilight, is often obscured with mists, and entirely

entirely withdrawn in the night; or because his aching sense shrinks back from the rash attempt to look up steadfastly to the sun in it's meridian brightness?—Wouldst thou, most potent Rationalist, abjure the use of thy reasoning faculty altogether, because foolish men abuse it wofully, the wisest are often perplexed with doubt, are prone to err, and find every where in nature something above their reach?—Thou disclaimest all power in man to receive the blessing of this revelation. “No idea, thou sayest, can I form of the merciful purposes which it proclaims of a Deity, of whose Essence it gives me no clear conception.”—Of his essence, we ask, who is it that pretends to have a clear idea? Dost thou precisely know the essence of any one being whatsoever? Fix thy thought for trial, as steadily as thou canst, upon any one present and most familiar to it, upon the flame of this taper, for instance. Of it's external modes, or qualities, it is indeed allowed thee to form some proper inferences from the effects that strike thy senses, it's brightness, colour, heat, it's flitting form, &c. But of it's essence,

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it's internal substance, tell us, what notion hast thou? Of thy own soul, the properties, the affections, the faculties are rendered familiar to thy acquaintance by reflection. What idea does it afford thee of it's essence? Let the unedifying wordy war, about Matter and Spirit, so often carried on in vain, interrupted, renewed by fits, and always terminated alike, without coming to a rational conclusion, declare the invincible ignorance of man. Be satisfied that of the Supreme All-ruling Spirit, no more an object of corporeal sense, than that soul of thine, it is not given thee to form a clear and determinate idea. But his marvelous operations, the effects of his infinite power, skill, beneficence are manifested, are forcibly impressed upon every thinking mind, from every part, as well the minutest as the greatest of the visible creation. To these is thine alone a stranger?

"No," thou repliest, "upon the divine government of the natural world, I wave all farther contest. The course of nature, and of it's astonishing phenomena, are the

the immediate objects of my bodily senses. They demonstrate boundless wisdom and might existing somewhere ; but where or how, or in what being or beings, who can tell ? It is of the divine dispensations, with respect to the future destiny of the moral world, that I still insist upon it neither you, nor I, know any thing at all. What your Bible, and its ever-jarring interpreters tell us about it, is contradicted by all I can see of it, in our present state, the events of which, respecting punishment to vice, or reward to merit, experience assures me, no regular moral government conducts. They are evidently left at random to the freaks of Fortune, or abandoned to the irregular passions of creatures stiled honourable, noble, gracious, reverend, rational, though generally as deficient in foresight, or any wise or good purpose, as Chance itself."—

He has, it is confessed, seen something of the world, who talks at this rate, but of the worst side of it only. It is pity but he had seen a little more, with due attention considered

considered the better side of it, and been taught to examine deliberately the relations, tendencies and contingencies of what he may have seen. The rambling attacks of such a speculative smatterer, who in times of uncontrolled licentiousness, will most frequently start up in your way, you may thus repel:—The confusion that reigns in thy own breast thou hast visibly displayed. Thou hast fairly avowed the discomfort, that springs from intellectual darkness, and conscious moral depravity. Be farther candid. Seriously press these queries to a too unfeeling heart.—How far have it's own contumacy and ungodly lusts occasioned it's inability to admit one cheering glimpse of the most hopeful blissful truths, which the mind of man can possibly contemplate? — Does not compelled experience, and a quick sense of the lamentable dimness, habitually acquired, far more than natural, of thy mental faculties, does not this extreme narrowness of thy conceptions constrain thee to confess the high expediency, the apparent necessity of a divine revelation? —How seasonable is that benign interposition

position of the grace of God mercifully tendered to thy acceptance, in his Gospel? How unaccountably rejected with disdain, upon this preposterous plea;—because thou seest nought, without it, but sadness, confusion, doubt, inextricable gloom around thee?—Art thou obstinately bent to behold the whole system of animated and spiritual, of intelligent and moral beings, involved in a desperate state of endless disorder and perplexity? Can the beautiful workmanship of an all-gracious Deity be to thee an object, not of senseless indifference merely, but of malevolent censure? He invites, he engages thee to extend thy prospect beyond the limits of this transitory scene of cares and trials. Behold he opens to thy view, to the meditation of thy humbled, contrite and regenerated heart, the connection of the present life with a life to come, of a world, which amidst a profusion of good and countless beauties, which claim our grateful admiration, exhibits nothing to thy benighted soul but confusion and misrule, with another world, “wherein dwelleth righteousness;” or where alone the seeming irregular dispensations

fations here, will be found in perfect conformity with impartial justice and boundless beneficence.—Because it is not given thee upon earth to enjoy the exalted privilege of the saints in heaven, “to know even as thou art known,” art thou desperately bent to exclude the hopeful glimpse of opening day, to abide still in self-condemned and voluntary darkness?—

The keen disputant will here be apt to turn the edge of the last question upon the querist.—“We are not singular,” he will say, “in preferring darkness to the light. Has it not been your constant practice, for sixteen centuries at least, solemnly to demand our most devout attention, (with dire denunciations against those who cannot declare their hearty assent) to those very articles of your creed, which learned arrogance, in scorn of common sense, has contrived to extract from texts, by yourselves involved in profound obscurity, but which probably were not perplexing to the first readers of your scriptures?—How can you have the impudence to tell us, these controverted points were ever *revealed*, while numberless

less doubts about them are on all sides yet maintained, and yourselves have sometimes modestly enough to confess you cannot explain, or pretend to understand them?—Upon mysteries which you assert, and know not how many hundreds to one admit not to be taught by Christ, do not you presume to speculate, and pronounce with a peremptory decision, yet with outrageous contradiction, animosity and redoubled anathemas, thundering still from all quarters."

Impotent as this petulant charge can be proved to be against the firm basis of our faith itself, disencumbered of its ill-adapted glosses, though of great force against many a groundless claim of dogmatism, and bigotry, you may with confidence thus reply; having previously allowed the propriety of its application to our anti-christian feuds—We are persuaded, and with full satisfaction allow, (though you will hardly thank us for it,) that your censure is perfectly orthodox, and in exact conformity with the spirit of the Gospel of Christ. The whole tenor of the New Testament more directly condemns those

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violent outrages against it, than even you have found words to express. Could you seriously attend to the true spirit of the Gospel, you would always find it conciliatory throughout, beneficent and rational, as the abuses of it, you have so justly reprobated, are contentious, malevolent and absurd. These abuses, whether countenanced, or as you are pleased to call it, established by general practice, the sincerest friends to the honour of our church more heartily condemn than you, to whom they afford so plausible a pretence for mock-triumph over a religion, whose main tendency they manifestly counteract.—

Unhappily the Deist has been taught to consider all Christians as enthusiasts, or bigots. His favourite sophistical historian*, from whom he has learned to resolve all religion into superstition or fanaticism, is as inconsistent and illusive in all he advances upon this head, as in his undecided and versatile political tenets. Even he, whether struck with a momentary

* David Hume.

compunction at the felt indignation of all thinking men, provoked by this vile prevarication, frequent in his other works, that runs through the whole first printed volume of his History ; or what is more probable, aware of the detriment their contempt might bring upon the sale of his book, thought it expedient to apologize for this apparent impiety, in the close of the subsequent volume, by an *amende honorable*, as equivocal as the conclusions of a staunch sceptic are, in whatever he seems, (for he deals in seeming only) to affirm or controvert. Yet is this the man, whose energetic frankness the deistical party so extravagantly applauds. But let him speak for himself *.—“ This sophism,” (whose but his own?) “ of arguing from the abuse of a thing against the use of it, is one of the grossest, and at the same time, the most common, to which men are subject. The proper use, he adds, of religion, is to reform men’s lives, to purify their hearts, to enforce all moral duties, and to secure obedience to the laws of the civil magistrate.”—‘ But why,’

* Hume’s Hist. of Great Brit. Vol. II. P. 449.

(says a shrewd Remarker, 'on the quirks of this puny Dialectician from the north,' as he too contemptuously styles a writer, certainly not of weak or despicable talents, though sadly perverted by overweening vanity,) 'why, when he had heard so much of these bugbear counterfeits, Superstition and Fanaticism, was there not one word slipped in, to recommend this reforming religion? Not one word, in mere charity, for the honour of his dear country; that strangers at least, (for he writes at large, and for all mankind,) might not suspect, if ever indeed there was a true religion amongst us, that these impostors had driven her quite away?'—Now take *Hume's* disgracefully evasive mode of shifting off this pointed stroke.—“While religion pursues these salutary purposes, it's operations, though infinitely valuable, are secret and silent, and *seldom come under the cognizance of history*. The adulterate species of it alone, which inflames faction, animates sedition, and prompts rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open theatre of the world, and is the great source of revolutions and public convulsions. The historian therefore has

less occasion to mention any other kind of religion, and he may maintain the highest regard for true piety, even while he exposes the abuses of the false.”—

Listen next to the sarcastic reply of the Remarker, whose valuable tract *, attributed at first to Dr. *Hurd*, is now understood, upon good authority, to have been written by Dr. *Warburton*, of whose strong features it bears throughout the peculiar stamp.—‘ So it seems that what reforms men’s lives, and purifies their hearts, is not worth a wise historian’s notice. If it were, he gives a very cogent reason, why he should bring it to the notice of his readers likewise, for he tells us that,—“ the effects of this are secret and silent.”’

‘ Should not the historian therefore lend a tongue to this powerful, but modest directress of human life, and bring her, in all her lustre, into our acquaintance? But—“ She seldom comes under the cognizance of History.”—‘ More shame for these false masters of the ceremonies, who

* See Remarks on Mr. D. Hume’s Essay on the Natural History of Religion.

so scandalously abuse their office. This due reprehension of a rigorous Critic would have been delivered with a sterner tone, and possibly received by the detected Prevaricator, if not with shame, (of which extreme vanity is seldom susceptible) at least with some degree of consternation, had they both lived to see this day. *Hume's* pathetic pictures of the distracting conflicts of enthusiasm and bigotry are bold and masterly. They command our assent to their truth and propriety. Dire pests, no doubt, these perverted passions have ever proved to sound morality and sobriety of thought. But neither of these "two great sources of revolutions and public convulsions" have been the fell excitors of the dreadful havoc now raging in Europe, and threatening general desolation, and the destruction of all just, wise and orderly government. Of this tremendous hurricane, even He might now be compelled to acknowledge the prime conductor to have been that false philosophy, of which he plumed himself upon being accounted a mighty propagator.

Perhaps

Perhaps he might have caught some sympathy in the wretched fate of his less daring brother - infidel Rousseau. The long-continued mental derangement of the Genevan modern Philosopher, to whose mortification and afflictive malady, our famed British historian, even amidst professions of zealous friendship, is said to have been drawn in wantonly to contribute, might have disposed a heart, reported to have had many good propensities, to a serious contemplation of the visible consequences of his pernicious tenets. A deep melancholy preyed upon the soul of poor Rousseau. An original affection for truth and rectitude, had stricken it with perpetual agonies of painful reflection presageful of the miseries which his sceptical religious paradoxes, together with his fine-spun reveries on the *Equality of Conditions*, were likely to bring upon all civilized society. The high-flown compliments, once laughed at, as too extravagant even in France, their native soil, have been again revived and lavished upon the last-mentioned tract, which, in the land of Prate, gained him the first prize for brilliant eloquence, profound

found sagacity, and resistless force of argument! By himself they were frequently received with disgust and fullness: "*Vous vous moquez*, you are mocking at me, he fretfully replied, you needs must see it was all a sham, a mere *jeu d'esprit*." A frightfully mischievous sport it proved, as well to himself, as to the best regulated institutions of social life, the unavoidable imperfections of which, in his derogatory sketches, appeared most strangely disastrous. The foresight of the tendency of his notions, to unhinge them all, is well known to have turned his brain, haunting it perpetually with the spectres of all the sovereigns upon earth, and their enraged satellites, in league to persecute and worry him to death.

Having duly reflected upon this and many a similar instance of the horrors, which have distracted the minds of the bold revilers of what the wisest of mankind hold respectable and sacred, interrogate thus closely the conscience of your infidel opponent.—Is it against the gospel of Christ, and the sincere dispensers of it, in it's pure light, that you are now inveigh-

inveighing? Or is your boasted sagacity honestly employed in discovering the false pretences of those, who affecting to pry into mysteries unrevealed, not only wrest the scriptures to gain credit to their own crude notions, but raising ‘*fumum ex fulgore*,’ quench the light where it shines forth clearest? The world, in that case, might thankfully applaud your labour. Thus far success attend you. But there check your farther daring. The voice of heaven-taught Reason bids you stop—“lest you shall be found to fight against God.” Deride, as you list, the detected vain conceits imposed upon the blind credulity of man. Despise, as you securely may, the illusion of animal magnetism, of which none but convicted quacks ever pretended to know any thing. But presume not, at the peril of exposing your grosser ignorance, to contradict the unquestionable truth of the many wonders in the visible creation, of which the Supreme First Cause of All enables you to discern the wise purposes. Unless contented stupidly to admire, without apprehension, it is given you, in a certain degree, to perceive, to explain, to demonstrate

monstrate a regular series of secondary causes, productive by manifest design, of beneficent effects, throughout all the elements of earth, water, air, fire, ether, and electric vapour. Of the last, for instance, of the well - ascertained phenomena of electricity, can you, without shame, protest:—"My very senses shall not persuade me to believe them real, till I can discover their consistency with my preconceived ideas of the laws of gravity."—Something it is clear you do know; but because you know not every thing, particularly what Sir Isaac Newton declared to transcend the limits of his great understanding, are you indeed so extravagantly modest, as to resolve to know nothing at all?

Be candid in urging the following Query home to your inmost heart.—Is it sincerely as a system of mere speculations, of abstruse unintelligible doctrines, or insignificant rites, that you declare the reception of Christianity unworthy of your acute penetration?—* Peace, peace, for

* Shakespear.

shame,

shame, if not for charity.—Avow not so extreme a degree of wilful blindness. Full well you know, if indeed you know any thing of them, how intimate is the connection of the doctrines and precepts of Christ, with the whole of your moral conduct. How directly is their whole scope, (when interpreted *aright*, that is *plainly*, for then alone, in truth, does it at all concern you) applied to the regulation of your internal temper and outward actions? Ingenuously acknowledge that here lies nakedly exposed, though long concealed from yourself, the hitherto insuperable bar to your admission of the gospel. You dare not face a zealous friend, whose kind admonitions are dreaded, as unwelcome checks in your career of sin and folly.—

Having thus slightly noticed his principal objection, as utterly impertinent, or foreign to the subject, being raised against what Christianity is not, we are called upon to profess what it really is; or what the best informed and most respected members of every protestant church, however

ever they may differ in sentiments as to points of less importance, uniformly agree in declaring it to be. We may assure him that all, who are entitled to name the name of Christ, who are content to derive their faith from the pure fount of the sacred word, happily unite in maintaining the following essential points:— That our Lord and Saviour being sent to command our attention to the most momentous concern, that ever interested the sons of men, gave manifest proofs of his divine commission, by miracles wrought in the name, and with the authority of God, whose Son he proclaimed himself to be in a transcendent sense, pre-eminent above all the angelic host. To engage us, by a righteous and holy life upon earth, to aspire to the glories of heaven, he exhibited to the eyes of men a perfect pattern of unblemished righteousness and sanctity. His humility, condescension and candour, were exempt from all possible imputation of ambition, pride, or artifice. Though the model of perfection, which he set before us, was so incomparably glorious, that all that was ever esteemed laudable
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and amiable in every human character, combined in one, must fade away before it, yet it was equally adapted for the imitation of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest. His excellence in every virtue was indeed supereminent, his piety unparalleled, and sublime above mere mortals, his devotion to do his Father's will, uniform and without interruption; yet the moral tenor of his exemplary life is level to the apprehension of all understandings, suited to instruct the least informed, and persuade the wisest, to affect all hearts, the tenderest and most obdurate. We are excited to conform to it by every motive of regard to our eternal interests, by every principle of gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor, the Redeemer, and Exalter of the fallen race of mankind, the divine Guide, appointed to direct our steps through the snares and perils, the temptations and afflictions, that beset our paths on all sides, in this short state of trial, and conduct us safely to the abode of perfect security from all sin and misery. The works of beneficence beyond example, being truly miraculous, which he performed, before innumerable witnesses, of which

which occasionally vast multitudes at once were themselves the subjects, were all demonstrations of infinite wisdom and power indeed, but more especially of the adorable goodness of his Eternal Father, whose glory alone he sought to promote, in dispensing blessings to mankind.

The close of his ministry upon earth, his triumph over all our spiritual enemies at once, a sinful world, and death and hell, you may next display, with all its striking assemblage of awful but instructive circumstances. His character never shone forth with splendor so illustrious, as through the cloud of extreme humiliation. As his life exhibited a pattern of obedience to the law of righteousness, so his sufferings and death, foreseen and repeatedly foretold by himself to his disciples, and at the hour expected, voluntarily incurred, in all its bitterest agonies, gave a decided authenticity to that law. His rising from the dead, on the predicted third day, and visible appearance to his doubting followers, silenced all objection to it.—“ We now may run with patience the race that is appointed for us, looking unto
Jesus,

Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"—That Faith his resurrection advanced into Certainty. It revived and confirmed the confidence of his desponding friends in all his glorious promises. It presented a sure prospect of being also raised themselves into life immortal. It inspirited them to step forth undaunted, and persevere in declaring to the world the truth of what their eyes had seen. It strengthened their minds to establish their testimony by an infallible test, their calm encounter of persecution, torture and death, in all their direst shapes, in exultation to proclaim it with their dying breath, in triumph to seal it with their blood. The weak attempts of modern unbelievers to invalidate the faithful report of this countless host of witnesses have, by the grace of God, proved an occasion of bringing forward the successful exertions of a Lardner, a Mosheim, a Watson, a Paley, to the attention of a

* Heb. xii. 2.

slumbering

slumbering world. Never henceforth, it is hoped, will objections, the futility of which have been so ably exposed, stagger the faith of one sincere and intelligent inquirer.

In pressing the last argument, confusedly agitated in some late publications, there is one opinion perhaps not precisely warrantable, which it may be proper here to clear up. It is asserted too generally that intolerant and cruel measures are the chief promoters of the sects they persecute. That the grievous persecutions, which the primitive Christians underwent, were a powerful accessory cause why "the word of God so mightily grew and prevailed," cannot be doubted. That they were the principal efficient cause of it, is the notion, against which you here are cautioned. It has often been defended by facts plausibly misapplied, to the neglect of the one primary cause in question, which ought always to be kept in sight; I mean the resistless energy of the divine wisdom, exhibited in the gospel, the sanctity of it's precepts, the reasonableness of it's doctrines, when manifested
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in their original simplicity, before their clear light was darkened by the quaint conceits of theological sophists. To this you will add the potent effects of the beauty of holiness, displayed in the lives of it's earliest preachers, not likely to be duly attended to by the fond admirers of the modern philosophy. To account for the astonishing and truly miraculous propagation of our holy religion, let them look to the concurrent influence of merely incidental circumstances, as they will affect to stile them, whilst you, with a better grounded confidence, ascribe it to the transcendent moral excellence of it's doctrines, and the immediate operation of a supremely wise Controller of the spiritual, as well as the natural world.

As both the historian and divine, the adversary and defender of the faith, appear to have laid an undue stress upon the supposed * Antiperistasis of Persecution, in the establishment of a re-

* This silly word is used to express an exploded principle of false philosophy, by which any quality becomes the more intense, through the increased opposition of it's contrary.

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ligious system, let us see whether some light may not be thrown upon the matter, by considering and comparing the different events it has produced upon different occasions. This may especially assist us in the best mode of defending our holy religion. Let us inquire why the religion, such as it was, of the Popish missionaries could not survive the persecution of the Emperor of Japan. Did it not plainly indicate a radical defect, an internal principle of dissolution, that rendered it impossible it should out-live the fiery trial? Was it not manifestly this? Their religion was not a “* reasonable service, acceptable to God, conformed to his holy, good, and perfect will.” It was not a religion that approved itself to the best, the most enlightened judgment of man. It was not a system, that illustrated to the most unlearned and simple minds, that confirmed, by divine sanctions, to the most unstable, but honest hearts, the only true religion of nature. It was not, in short, that Christianity which triumphed over the com-

* Rom. xii. 1, 2.

bined opposition of all the power and wisdom of this world, the wavering tenets of it's most renowned philosophers, the violence and wily craft of it's most remorseless tyrants.

View next the contrasted triumphs of Truth. The cruelties, the massacres inflicted upon the pious and virtuous Wickliffites and Gospellers in this island, on the Hussites and Hugonots in Germany and France, by sanguinary bigots and despots, in league against their dreaded foe, a timely reformation, not only failed to exterminate, they enhanced the glory of that pure and primitive Gospel verity, which with the matchless ardour and fortitude of a sincere devotion, these glorious Confessors laboured to restore. And by the favourable control of Divine Providence, their sufferings and labours were crowned with a signal, though not complete success. Their generous passion for the truth exalting them far above all mean ambition, they earnestly pursued their impartial scrutiny. They in general, though, I allow, not always, supported their triumphs over established error

and superstition by intelligible and sound argument, sufficient, in a great degree, to clear the sacred text from the accumulated mass of fallacious glosses, with which not *Priestcraft* alone, (which in the quaint vocabulary of infidels is wont to bear all the blame,) but more especially, *blundering and bewildered learning*, had long encumbered it. That their abilities, eminent and most highly respectable as they certainly were, yet human still, and limited, were equal to the entire accomplishment of this great work, it would indeed, at this day, betray a disreputable degree of ignorance to assert.

Your persevering thus in vindicating the genuine spirit and principles of our holy religion, by arguments, the substantial strength and solid foundation of which you have previously well ascertained, to the clear conviction of your own understanding, may too probably not insure you an attention equal to it's merit. It will however invincibly preclude the insolent reproach of an adversary habitually averse from serious inquiry, who rashly dares assert that the christian faith is
nothing

nothing but a mystical cant of words, which those who contend for it the loudest, presume not to explain, or to suppose capable of being ever rendered intelligible. Such a confession of faith as he has inconsiderately conceived the Christian to be, you will freely allow him to regard as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal, mere empty sound, without purpose, life, or efficacy, as nothing but a source of fruitless, at best, if not of pernicious doubt and disputation.

Repeat then calmly, without being disheartened at the necessity for a repetition, to which you must learn to submit yourselves with patience, (and excuse it in your *old* Addresser) that the religion to which you have been claiming his devout attention, being of divine and universal energy, perfective of our immortal nature, a perpetual spring of pure felicity, of moral excellence, order and harmony, has only been rejected, because he has, on many accounts, been utterly indisposed to form a right conception of it. His confirmed habits and prejudice are more incompatible

tible with it than the ferocious customs of a New Zealand savage with the most elegant and decent manners of polished society. How then shall we proceed to remove an indisposition apparently rendered invincible by wilful blindness, or an opposition to the light of Natural Reason? Surely not by the enforcement of doctrines equally contradictory to it, or to which it has confessedly nothing to say. We are unjustly accused of establishing a divinely sanctioned system of sound morality, and most interesting truth, upon ritual observances, and professions of faith, declaredly tending to supersede the uniform practice of the one, together with the exercise of the noblest faculty of our souls, in the zealous investigation of the other. Shall we think of recommending our internal creed and external ordinances, by engaging to prove that they shall perform a miracle, which the very schoolmen, who occasionally attempt it, say is denied to Omnipotence itself? Have we so learned Christ, that to prove our orthodoxy, we are bound to reconcile the most direct and palpable contradictions? It

It is too probable, the unblushing libertine, presuming upon his easy conquest over the enthusiasts who take this course, yet conscious of his weakness against your consistent expressions of a rational and well-grounded piety, will artfully confound them both, and obstinately recur to his customary scoff.—“Avaunt all church-gibberish, chimerical and idle fancies, mere nursery prattle, to puzzle, coax, or frighten children, productive only of delusive hopes, or distracting scruples, which all we, who dare to think and act freely, have long ago exploded, as interfering with all our present enjoyments. To these my trusty counsellors only am I resolved to listen. Does not Nature herself ordain the same? It is the language of my senses alone, that she allows me to understand. Avaunt, fanatical *Cant* and Prejudice.”—

Avaunt, with all my heart, you will readily rejoin; silenced for ever be all mere *Cant*, and unreasonable Prejudice, the sworn foes, no doubt, of solid wisdom and substantial happiness. But is it for unmeaning *Cant* that I am pleading?

Is it not for the rational Prejudice of all the wisest and most beneficent, the most universally esteemed and beloved of the children of men, the sincere admirers of true piety and virtue? Look round, I beseech you, who are their bitterest, most contemptible revilers? Are they not the abettors of inordinate licence, the inflammers of ungoverned passions, the patrons of vice and misery, the dire enemies first to themselves, and in consequence to the whole human race, and it's Almighty Author and Supreme Judge? — Your serene, but dignified reply will, it is presumed, be supported by that acknowledged steadiness of principle, that defies, invites the strictest scrutiny, which alone confirms the credit of all professions, religious, moral, or political. Yet to this arrogant self-degrader, to a libertine, vain of his kindred to the vilest reptiles human and bestial, it may probably, at first, fall greatly short of inspiring the intended purpose of reformation. One obvious occasion occurs to account for your ill success. Your application has been made to a heart habitually swayed by propensities which he has been just introduced

troduced as describing himself. The motives you have urged have been awful indeed, and of eternal cogency: but brutally intent on present objects alone, all concerns supposed to be remote he persists in treating with indifference, contempt and mockery.

Compel him now to assume a serious tone. Press directly home to his present feelings an object, that involves his dearest temporal interests. Awaken him to a quick perception of certain inconveniences naturally galling to a proud spirit, which his foolish vain-glory must inevitably bring upon him. Set before his eyes, in living characters, the natural appendages of that precious badge of distinction in discredit and infamy, which he affects to display. Let the interest of his darling vices themselves confute his potent rhetoric. Should he succeed in laughing or arguing other men out of these pious and virtuous principles, which hedge off the objects of his derision from all competition with him in his criminal indulgencies, no longer will he have to boast his peculiar advantage over them,
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his exclusive privilege of exemption from those rigid rules that fetter the adorers of an invisible Deity. But should he fail of persuading those he has to deal with to think like him, bid him shudder at the grievous penalty he has incurred by the attempt. Lo! he stands before the world convicted of a shameless declaration, that no tie of conscience, no righteous principle, no moral obligation, no sense of duty to God or man can bind him. In vain, like Lucretius, he may seek to keep his sickening pride alive, by sounding forth, with brazen front, his own extravagant panegyric, basely re-echoed back to him from a few ungodly flatterers. His false bravery must prepare to undergo a dastardizing proof. Is it indeed completely clad in armour of strength, to face with levity and unconcern, the general disdain and abhorrence, in which all the most revered and supereminently excellent of men have held, and will for ever hold this hateful and self-blasted character? His principles, abhorrent from all that wisdom, justice, benevolence constantly suggest, are of course repugnant to all those with which the sympathetic feelings

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of every rational being naturally accord,
The most presumptuous of these impious
scorners will, for an instant, lower his
crest, at the dispiriting prospect of ex-
treme abasement and wretchedness, at-
tendant upon justly incurred contempt,
and disgrace irretrievable.

But you know the man, and the audacity of a petrified heart. Expect then to see him start up afresh, emboldened to retort upon you this imputation of a general reproach, for running counter to the notions of the rest of the world. You shall hear him now declare himself authorized, by your own fears and lamentations, to confute your assertion.—“Your clerical menaces, he exclaims, of general condemnation, are as impertinent now as the extinguished thunders once issuing from the Vatican. How dare you presume to utter them, who are always pitifully whining about the rapid increase of the professed partizans of Infidelity? Terribly alarmed you have good reason to be at the rapid success, of late, of our attempts to rid mankind of the blind respect they pay to the tyranny and imposture of their enslavers,

slavers, Priests and Princes. I am glad you feel your own weakness. Let it teach you more humility. Do not contradict your doleful declamations from the pulpit, by proclaiming, in the same breath, your easy conquest over us, while it is plain our growing strength to crush you is scaring you out of your wits. Among the better, I mean the politer sort, with the men of rank, figure, and fashion, with us who live in the world, you see our prevalence is almost universal. From the pedantic invective of you, who live, or *should live*, out of it, what have we to fear?"—

With firm composure, disallow his presumptuous report of this strange overgrowth of Infidelity, so contrary to our hope and trust. The Libertine, we know, finds his account in spreading such reports. He exults on hearing them re-echoed louder still by the stupid or frantic abettors of superstition, whose dissonant outcries, of the total dereliction of all religion, do indeed add too much credit to these graceless and unprincipled boasters of their own incredible exploits. At
this

this calamitous and distracted crisis of political disorder and turbulence, amid the stunning din of fashionable extravagance and dissipation, it may well be expected that a serious and regular attention to the subject of religion will be less observable than in days of greater order and harmony. Upon the present really deplorable state of the moral world, reflection may not enable you to suppress an involuntary sigh. But let not your extreme anxiety for the accumulated woes, providentially ordained to be consequent upon it, induce you to doubt, one moment, of the purport of this severe dispensation. Declare it's determined and certain tendency to be this: To open the hearts of unthinking mortals to "the things which belong to their peace, that in times to come, they may no more be hid from their eyes."

The mind, now painfully drawn to contemplate the dire shapes of distress and wretchedness, which the world presents, as well among those whom it engages to whirl on within the gay vortex of it's pernicious

nicious follies, as those whom it impels into scenes of more immediate peril and terror, will soon, by the merciful decree of corrective justice, be directed to far different objects. Under a succeeding tranquil and settled order of things, it will deliberately consider the experienced effects of past enormities of conduct and principle. In a new set of improved characters, mankind will exhibit the salutary fruits of these reflections. The solid advantages of a prudent reform, of late esteemed unseasonable at least, if not impracticable, will then be embraced with safety, with the general approbation of all, who seek not to shelter their own unworthiness under a perpetuity of manifest abuses. In this future, it may be hoped, not very distant period, a fairer prospect will be opened, than at present, of the happy issue of your sedate expostulation with a libertine pupil of the New Philosophy. May it be your lot, my worthy *young* Brethren, with joy to hail, and with a well-tempered zeal to apply the blessed opportunity, when past experience of all it's horrors is fresh upon his mind. When-

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ever it shall please kind Heaven to ordain Adversity, the " * great tamer of the human breast," to fulfil it's office, in making him feel the wretchedness of his wild system, to afford him leisure for serious reflection: when presenting itself, on the one hand, in full view, armed with vengeance on the impenitent sinner, it shall, on the other hand, have pointed out, to the repentant, the path to mercy and peace: then will your divinely simple faith, your confident hope of a happy futurity, now the butt of his affected scorn, amidst involuntary bursts of envy, begin visibly to attract his anxious, his respectful regard. Aversion will be softened first into silent regret, improveable soon into a wish to become, with you, partaker of a better inheritance.

In the mean time, let the soothing preface of this merciful Providence admonish you to suspend your present alarms at the desperate lamentations of the pretended friends, or the exulting vaunts of the open foes of true religion. It is not

* Gray.

denied

denied that Infidelity and Practical Atheism are now stalking abroad with a bolder front; they vent their impiety with less reserve, than when more liable to legal prosecutions, pains and penalties. That mode of confutation is not less detrimental than discreditable to the cause of sacred truth. You cannot wish to see it's aid applied to the support of your faith, whose unshaken stability rests as little upon public authority, as upon private prejudice accidentally contracted, but upon free investigation of the doctrines of Christ himself, upon clear conviction and enlightened choice. Let it's adversaries proceed to their utmost daring. It is by putting forth all their strength in a fair trial, they will be impelled to feel their weakness, and accelerate their own defeat.

Behold then, at one view, their whole force, drawn up in array before you. Though often routed, you see them dragged reluctant to the charge, for want of new supplies. Their appearance to you will be most familiar, though a little disguised, and accoutered afresh, under the

the banners of the New Philosophy.—
 “The material world, these newly illuminated Sophists proclaim to be not only eternal and self-existent, but the Sole Author of existence to all beings, animate and inanimate.—Though devoid itself of sense, of purpose, foresight or intelligence, it is the only source from whence all sentient and intelligent beings derive those faculties.—All the various phenomena, or changes it exhibits, orderly or disorderly, good or evil, are at one time necessary effects, without a cause, at another, the contingent productions of blind Chance.—As the former hypothesis excludes from the universe all agency or voluntary power of motion, either original or communicated from this dead First Cause of life, the latter renders precarious the permanency of its existence for the next instant.—Opinion veering incessantly, and at random, to either, equally debars from both all intention, motive, or final cause.—Hence, the following series of conclusions, the sole aim, the overbearing drift of libertinism reduced into system, advances in full display.—Man, a passive individual

link of casual impulses and attractions, is bound by no law but what regards himself alone.—Nothing to man is good, but that which, at the moment is pleasant, nothing is evil, but that which is unpleasant to himself. — The notion then that man is an accountable being, if it restrains him from any thing called a crime, that is productive of pleasure to himself, is a foolish superstition.—He is consequently wise, and not a “fool, (as Solomon calls him,) who makes a mock at sin,” or laughs at the supposition that any act, it pleases him to do, can be any offence against the law of an unseen Ruler and Judge.—To him the good or ill will of this imaginary Sovereign are matters of equal unconcern.—From a Being, of whom he knows nothing, nothing in reason has he to hope or fear.—The idea that an ever-present Deity observes the actions, the very thoughts of man, though maintained in words, is believed by no one, most visibly not by priests and bigots, whose vicious morals belie the notion.—Of a divine observance, account, or interference, not the slightest vestige is discernible upon earth.—That
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the consummation of this account, in some unknown world, is reserved to a judgment to come, is not the principle that governs the lives of the preachers of that doctrine.—More consistent is the conduct and language of the New Philosophers, who laugh at the absurdity of ascribing Omniscience to an unintelligent being, Goodness, or Justice to a necessary one.—In what is called religion they can see nothing but a continual contradiction to their common sense and natural affections.—Self-taught, without the expence of inspiration, or borrowed instruction, they have discovered that as, before his conception, Man existed not, so after death he will be nothing.—Between the two extremes of original and final non-entity, as he rose unconscious into life, like a bubble in a turbid current, so he is hurried down the stream, by the resistless power that blindly governs all his movements, and determines, utterly without purpose, the short period of his existence.

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You have here an imperfect sketch, certainly not an exaggerated one, of the New Philosophy. You will be lucky indeed, if being possessed of the main tenets of the derider of natural and revealed religion, you can obtain your request, that he will consent to bring the avowed articles of his creed to a fair discussion. Most easy will then be your task to convict him of palpable disingenuity and wilful ignorance in every one of them, when brought to the test of reason. But what, alas ! with him is reason ? What, but the echo of his ruling passions, avarice, ambition, sensuality ? Their distracting calls, though they impel him different ways, all combine in drowning the voice of a divinely commissioned censor, conscience. To the worship of those relentless demons of his idolatry he sacrifices truth and virtue, the dignity, the perfection of his rational nature. To emancipate himself from duty, his appointed guide to endless happiness, he becomes the willing slave of guilt, the source of perpetual misery. Thus ingeniously exclusive is his system of irreligion,

gion, of all prospect or hope of future good, all compensation or comfort under the pressure of present evil.

When in the course of your ministry you shall rejoice in the occasion of answering the challenge of a doughty Philistine of this tribe, who thus defies the armies of the living God, you will encounter him in full security, clad in the weighty armour of the heroes above recommended. But if, unexperienced as yet, you shall say : " I cannot go with these," it may, in the mean time, suffice to smite him down, if you will stoop to pick up a smooth pebble from the shallow brook, from the slight hints contained in this and the foregoing section. With an obstinate opponent, against conviction of those truths, which all objects in nature, without him and within, should press home to his inmost heart, as it's best support in life and death, what after all remains for you to do? Submitting to the necessity of consigning him, for awhile, to his own heart-felt pangs and upbraidings, for belying thus the voice of God within him, do not yet utterly despair of reclaiming him ; but at
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some more lucid intervals, tenderly urge these compassionate Queries:—Is it any satisfaction, any advantage that he can have in view, by excluding, in idea, his conduct and concerns from the cognizance of perfect wisdom and goodness, or is it merely a respite he seeks from the dread of avenging justice?—What interest can he have in assigning the formation and guidance of this wonderful frame of nature to a blind Chance, without cause or purpose?—Can he discover any absurdity in our believing that he who made the world is both able and willing to superintend and control all the events of it, great and small, so as best may serve his gracious ends ordained by infinite Wisdom?—Will he maintain that he is not blessed with faculties to discern any one of these gracious ends in his contemplation of nature?—Is he indeed so unhappy as he represents himself; has he no perception or sensibility of the wisdom, the equity, the beneficent tendency of the moral law, impressed by God upon the heart of every rational being?—Necessarily conscious of the obvious purport of the divine law, can he hesitate one moment

ment to pronounce that his interest and happiness are combined with his duty, in requiring his punctual obedience to it?—

Have not the dignity and perfection of the human nature, in the intent, and moral constitution of divine Providence, been exhibited, in various degrees, in the lives of good men in all ages, in the worst of times, but especially under the covenant of grace, or in plainer phrase, under the light of the gospel?—Is not Man, as a moral agent, capable of looking backward on the influence of his past conduct, and forward, to that of his present actions, upon the general welfare, and of judging, approving, or condemning them accordingly?—Is not Man, in his best, or most undepraved state, with all his passions, powers and faculties under due regulation, and in complete harmony with each other, a creature, that reflects no disgrace, but glory upon his Maker?—Is not the tenet of the gloomy enthusiast, (which he grounds upon texts of scripture strangely misapplied,) that this harmony has never, in any degree, existed in man, since the fall, but by that event,

event, this commended work of a beneficent Deity, is in all respects rendered incorrigibly corrupt and abominable," as false in fact, as derogatory to the honour of God and man?—But are not the maxims and conduct of the libertine and brutal sensualist, which add some colour to this gross libel on the whole human race, a proof, that bad men may, by their private vices, debase themselves below their rank in the creation.

Feel he must, and if he has one spark of ingenuity left, confess his inability to oppose the shadow of an argument against what is thus propounded. Should he now be no longer obstinately bent to steel his heart, and close his eyes from the light for ever, you may haply thus have awakened him to a quick sense of the wisdom and goodness of the Governor of all things. He may perceive at last the utter impossibility of his disowning his immediate and perpetual dependance upon God, for all the good he can enjoy or hope for, and that his only security for a permanent possession of this good, is in his voluntary

voluntary obedience to the divine will. Inform him, or entreat him to inform himself, of what experience, if duly attended to, will enforce upon his consideration, that a distinct apprehension of the exact manner of existence of any other being, or even of his own, exceeds the abilities which God has been pleased to bestow upon mortal man. How then should he attain ideas adequate to that of the Supreme Being, of whom the delirious speeches of the mystical enthusiast, as well as of the infidel, are so offensively familiar? Though “ * the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth also with the humble and contrite spirit,” how far his essence, his infinite and incommunicable attributes transcend our limited faculties, we demonstrate in the terms we use to express them. But he has ordained that his relations to us, as our Almighty Creator, our kind Preserver, our righteous Sovereign, Lawgiver and Judge, should be sufficiently clear and intelligible to all. So far no mystery, no alledged confusion, or jargon of words

* Isaiah lvii. 15.

without

without meaning, can be complained of. "The finger of God has written the laws," decreed to regulate our conduct most plainly on the table of the human heart, though with a varied force of impression in different subjects. All are able, who are but willing to ascertain in what degree their lives are conformable to the sacred standard of right, which is displayed to the clear apprehension of all men by an internal monitor and guide, which some have chosen, with a happy precision, to stile a Moral Sense.

Upon this benign constitution of our nature a most unedifying controversy has been kindled, and carried on for ages, to prove literally, from the texts above alluded to, that "all the imaginations, and thoughts of the heart of man are only evil continually, and at enmity with God." Though it has, in great measure, been verbal only, the sad havoc and confusion it still continues to make in the intellects of the devotees of a certain sect, are real and manifest. The prevalence of beneficent and virtuous sentiments and actions, the preponderance of moral good

good over evil upon earth, without which our whole species must long ago have been utterly at an end, is in vain deemed to be confuted by the criminal conduct of the lawless libertine, or the reproachful rants of the misanthropical enthusiast. It is in proportion to the attention we pay to this heaven-appointed arbiter within of all our motives, purposes and actions, that originally springs all our rectitude or peace of mind. Upon the maintenance of it's integrity, by the grace of God, depend all our hopes, and the security of our future happiness. By persons of the two opposite casts of character, it's awful voice is in fact equally, if not professedly, disregarded. The abandoned Profligate openly avows his insensibility to it's dictates. He rejects it, as you see, as a restraint upon his darling passions; whilst the bigot and false pretender to religion, affect no less to dispute it's divine authority. These would fain discredit the existence of a principle so honourable to human nature, but whose importunate censure exposes to their own contempt the futility of all their subtle shifts, under cover of implicit faith, formalities,

malities, indulgences, dispensations, &c., to sin with impunity.

It is, after all, by an appeal to this internal authoritative principle of all *rational agents*, who as such, are of course exempt from absolute or necessary control, that all must experimentally know their measure of ability to discern, and perform the will of God. You will not expect to persuade an Infidel to rejoice, with you, in the faith of a supernatural and especial grace of God, vouchsafed to supply his natural infirmity. But you may demonstrate, both to him and the bigotted assertor of the original pravity, yet at once the invincible necessity of all human thoughts and actions, the reality of that sacred principle, about which they persist in maintaining a pernicious wordy contest. Ought not the joint declaration of Scripture and Reason to silence it for ever: that it is “* a law, written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts ac-

• Rom. ii. 15. It is of the Gentiles that St. Paul, the supposed Apostle of rigid Calvinism, thus writes.

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cusing or else excusing one another?" If Heaven shall grant this home-felt and direct appeal to the inmost soul of the libertine to take some effect; if his Conscience, thus probed, shall make him begin to feel all the consequences of his wilful deviations from the obvious line of duty, you will have made no small progress towards his full conviction. When you perceive him giving way, however ungraciously, and consenting to decline all farther contest, upon the most essential points, succinctly touched upon, in the foregoing paragraphs, you may begin to cherish some hope, that "putting off his former conversation, he may be led to apply his heart to seek out that wisdom, which alone, by well doing, may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

One important suggestion here occurs, which I must not urge you to address to the sneering Infidel, now reclaimed to a degree of serious reflection, without a previous caution.—Search well the ruling affections and sentiments of your own hearts, and the correspondent tenor of your conduct in life. If your conscience

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in the scrutiny stands perfectly clear ; if it emboldens you to speak out, without a blush, declare it freely thus : It is the Christian, the true Christian alone, who from the constant experience of his heart and mind is enabled to form a proper estimate of all worldly enjoyments. It is the Gospel alone that inspires the joint-heir, with Christ, of a heavenly throne, with that elevation of soul that looks down, with a generous disdain, upon the reptile race of scramblers for earthly dignities, the sordid pursuits of the slaves of avarice, or sensual appetite, the despicable, useless, and most commonly pernicious life of the mere man of fashion, with all the round of frivolous amusements, that fill up it's empty dream. These are the various objects that consume the time and engross the attention of the man of the world. If you have been observed to descend with eagerness into their groveling views and measures, if you have been habituated to mingle with their petty intrigues and factions, to engage in the dirty work of popular elections, to exhibit an unbecoming face of fond intrusion into parties of loose dissipation, you must be
sensible

sensible that a formal condemnation from your mouth of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, contrasted with your known character, will be stiled an impudent grimace. The ridicule, in that case, will not rest, as in reason it ought, altogether on your own head. It will unluckily be diverted, by the scoffers, to reflect upon the religion, which you profess to preach.

If on the contrary your perfect decency of morals and conversation, evincing an uniformly serious sense of religion, shall give credit and dignity to your profession, shall obviate all suspicion that it is in this life only you have hope, and that you really look not for a more abiding country, you will feel in yourselves, and your opponent will feel it too, an energetic power, with grace and effect, to dispel the mist from his eyes. You may then inform him, that the vanity of earthly grandeur, wealth or pleasure, and their utter insufficiency to real happiness, which all their magnificence, or affected gaiety, he inwardly deplores, is upon the christian plan alone reconcileable to the infinite wisdom

wisdom and goodness of God. This problem, the profoundest speculations of mere man, however ingenious, have in all ages been utterly unable to solve. Tell him the perpetual disappointments, vexation and wretchedness of this life, are purely medicinal in the hands of the Grand Restorer, are instruments of merciful discipline and improvement, preparatory to a better state, wherein dwelleth righteousness, permanent and unmixed felicity.

If you have been careful to seize the critical moment, seldom vouchsafed by the habitual foe to sedate reflection; if you have engaged and fixed his attention upon the infinite importance of the subject, more than upon yourselves, or your manner of enforcing it, you may proceed successfully in setting religion before him, in it's most amiable and engaging lights. It is confessedly our best support under the pressure of adverse fortune, our securest fence against ourselves, when elated by proud prosperity. It alone adds permanency to our brightest and most hopeful, expels despair from our darkest and most fearful

fearful prospects. It is also what his imagination had never conceived it to be, the purest fount of present satisfaction, peace and joy. May you, my christian brethren, be duly qualified, with confidence, to make this declaration from your own experience. If a lively sense of the supreme benignity of that revelation, that brought life and immortality to light, shall bring habitually present to your own minds the delightful truths, which you are bound to inculcate constantly to others, and to endear, if possible, to their affections; rich and plentiful may be the fruit of your labours, like the delicious products of a tropical sun. If a subject so transcendently glorious and inspiring plays idly on the fancy, or dwells only on the tongue, your most dazzling eloquence will avail nothing. If wavering at one time in your conception of the glad tidings of the gospel, at another obstinately bigotted to some tenet of polemical sophistry, you delight in rendering dim and misty it's originally transparent clearness, you lose sight entirely of it's one grand purpose, *the display of a gracious Providence, exerted to promote, and finally*

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complete the moral perfection, and perpetual happiness of mankind; you will neither kindle in yourselves, nor diffuse in your hearers, more vital and prolific warmth than the transient flashes of an Aurora borealis, or the pale glimpses of the moon upon the polar snows.

Can the contemplation of infinite wisdom planning, perfect goodness and justice conducting what almighty power will infallibly accomplish, the making all beings throughout the universe work together for good to the righteous adorer of God; can the mental perception of an object like this fail to transport you with incessant admiration, love and gratitude? In the performance of the duties of your sacred function, which the public is highly interested in holding truly respectable, you will keep this ruling maxim ever present to your minds, that the most brilliant exhibition of genius or learning, displayed in expounding the doctrines of the gospel, where no credible evidence appears of your own cordial conviction of their authenticity, can produce no lasting benefit to yourselves, or your spiritual charge.

charge. Let the exemplary and uniform regularity of your own good conduct confirm the sincerity of your blessed hope of everlasting life dependent on it, you will ensure success to your pious exertions. It is the resistless beauty of *Sacred Truth* alone, when thus made visible, that lives, that acts, that speaks to the most insensible heart. Without a quick sense of it's vital presence in you, it's preachers, in your private characters, as well as in your public solemnities, all it's natural influence upon the morals, and the minds of men, may in consequence be withdrawn for ever. God himself may at length imperceptibly cease to be in all their thoughts. Your heart-felt addresses to your audience, in his holy name, shall exalt them above temporal, to a view of their eternal interests. You may then announce to them, in the words of Christ, that "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Even now do they behold him present in his holy ordinances here, and aspire to a nearer and nearer contemplation of his glories and perfections for evermore.

Among the different sects of Christians, all celebrating loudly the superior sanctity of their peculiar tenets and modes of worship, not one has cause to boast of the conformity of the lives of the generality of their brethren to the divinely-sanctioned moral plan, which they all profess to revere in common. Exceedingly dispiriting is this reflection to the sincere believer, in deed as well as in word, in heart as in profession. He deplores the pitiable state of the undissembling infidel, yet not without a wish, and far more probable hope of reclaiming him than the formal pretender to a faith, which his works belie. He considers such an infamous hypocrite as figuring most conspicuously among the vilest of the unbelieving tribe, and the mock-respect of the one as equally offensive, and more disgraceful to religion, than the open derision of the other. He feels within his breast a firm reliance on the God of truth, a full persuasion that his mercy and favour await the sincere though imperfect observer of his law and covenant, while shame, remorse, or inevitable ruin, is the portion

portion of him, whose life denies the God whom he professes to know.

If your hearts have actually caught the holy flame, the light of your good works will of course shine forth before men, and excite them also, in the uniform tenor of their manners and principles, "to glorify your Father, which is in heaven." You have, I doubt not, been often struck with the lucky accuracy and precision, the *curiosa felicitas* of two words in the learned languages;—the one *Integritas*, (from *integer*, completely whole,) how properly expressive of a constant uniformity of righteous principles and conduct! It clearly indicates the character of a perfectly good man. He in truth is not an *entire* man, a part of whose soul is paralysed by the habitual indulgence of one habitual sin, by a cold indifference to religion, by an inveterate devotion to party-prejudice.---'Ευδαιμονία, (a good temper of mind,) how aptly does it point out, how justly does it recommend what constitutes the real essence of all true *happiness*!—From the potent charm of the beauty of holiness in a character visibly com-

combining these two lovely properties, the Libertine and Infidel, the Bigot and Hypocrite will be forcibly drawn to contemplate a train of ideas, perhaps quite new to them, and before incomprehensible. With a pleasing wonder they will find themselves, in some degree enabled to conceive an apparent consistency between the apostolical precept of rejoicing evermore, and our Saviour's apparently severe injunctions of self-denial, taking up the cross, &c. which as obviously as rightly understood, only denote a generous disdain of sinful pursuits, and contempt of all dangers that obstruct us in our line of duty.

You may tell them that religion, free from superstition, neither abridges nor impairs any one sincere pleasure ; but that God has in mercy ordained that none should be sincere, or suitable to the condition of man in this world, that might render him unfit for admission to a better. Yet various and manifold are the pure and innocent delights, accommodations and comforts, which he has bountifully strewed in our way to it. The enthusiast and
libertine

libertine deceive themselves alike, who fancy that Christianity interferes, or clashes in the least with these benign dispensations of Providence. It exalts them, on the contrary, to the highest pitch, by presenting them, as an earnest and pledge of pleasures infinitely nobler, by directing our eye to a state, where our capacities shall be enlarged, and adapted to enjoyments celestial, and above mortal apprehension. These tidings it delivers as received immediately from that supremely exalted Being, the express image of his Eternal Father, who descended from the spiritual and invisible world, to which he invites, and prepares the way for us to follow him and dwell with him for ever.

The unbeliever, yet reluctant to declare himself convinced of these important gospel truths, and own his pleas defeated, may interrupt you here, by recurring, with an appearance of greater candour, to his former objection.—“ Though you cannot persuade me to believe exactly as you do, you have contrived at least, with an art somewhat unusual in a clergyman, to be tolerably understood.

This

This simple exposition of your evangelical doctrines, may, for aught I know, be just and reasonable enough. But pray tell me honestly, is it the doctrinal system of any one church in Christendom? Great are the additional demands upon my credulity, which all, not excepting your church in particular, still maintain. They all are eager, as the craft well knows, to promote the most outrageous sticklers for these demands to their highest dignities. Thus exalted, they enforce our implicit compliance with them, they reprobate our profane attempts at exposing their most glaring absurdity to public derision, with sufficient consistency. Sensible of the necessity to which they have driven themselves, in their own defence, of terrifying us out of our wits, they thunder out their anathemas, calvinistical and lutheran, papal and methodistical, clogging the very creeds, in which they profess their faith in the blessed tidings you have been piously proclaiming, with those damnable clauses, which all but themselves are ashamed of, as too gross an insult to poor human reason."—

You

You may confidently disclaim all demands or denunciations of this sort, in the name of the most intelligent and respected members of our church. By using their right to a latitude, which they think fairly justifiable in their interpretation of the points, which have excited, and still maintain, though with diminished fury, the unchristian rage of controversy: They will, I believe, advance nothing as indispensibly necessary to salvation, but what perfectly accords with the plain, and, I trust, faithful account before delivered of the doctrines of Christianity. At the same time, you may acknowledge, without reserve, that you heartily lament that the artifices of Obstinacy and Pride, (which are and ever will be in league with Ignorance to confound all truth,) still persist, in spite of the fairest opportunities of better information, in imposing on patient humility, a silent acquiescence at least, if not a loud concurrence in all their empty jargon. You will observe, with concern, how pernicious is the false impression of religion, which many a wavering pretender to free-thinking is prompted

prompted to conceive, from writings and preachments of that unfortunate stamp.

It is a stumbling-block, which it behoves you indignantly to spurn aside, at the very opening of your conference with a reasoning Infidel. What those bigots pertinaciously contend for, they are indeed so far from submitting to rational discussion, (an act, according to them, of most heinous impiety,) that they profess it to be utterly impossible for the human mind to form the slightest idea, or (in the phrase of logicians,) the simple apprehension of what they still contend for, as the fundamental article of their blind faith. If you have been fated to witness the ridiculous course, but seriously piteous issue of a conference between one of these mole-eyed advocates for religion, and an equally ignorant and conceited adversary to it, you must have observed how peculiarly adapted each of the disputants was to confirm the other, and make him glory the more in his own confuted, (yet invincible still, his alternately victorious, because equally inexplicable

plicable) prejudice. Having neither of them, in the contest, been properly directed to turn his attention to the general, and therefore the most obvious tenor of a system, founded by Supreme Wisdom for universal reception, the enthusiast misconceives, the libertine rejects the whole altogether.

You see how incumbent it is upon you to inform an irreligionist, who shews some disposition to sober reflection, in what light he must regard the proud zealot, who disparaging the pure christian faith, declares those to be the most essential parts of it, which are, in truth, quite foreign to it, and most liable to render the temper and conduct of it's pretended votaries repugnant to it's genuine spirit. Tell him frankly that ingeniously misunderstood, or wilfully unattended to, the simplicity of the gospel is, to this day, suffered to give place to notions, no more derived from Christ, than they are from Confucius, Odin, or Brahmah : that the chief pride of certain highly venerated dogmatists, or wilful dwellers in darkness visible, amidst the blaze of noon, has been

to

to lose themselves in endless difficulties, to their intricate solutions of which they claim our attention the more, the more they are declared, by their vain attempts, to be insurmountable. Unhappily they have not stopped here. They have claimed so implicit a regard to be paid to their unintelligible comments, as stupidly to neglect, or madly to depreciate the most obvious practical and saving truths of Christianity. By taking a contrary course from these lovers of darkness and perplexity, these assuming dunces, whose intemperance and pride betray their utter ignorance of the meek and humble character of evangelical wisdom, you will avoid the prime obstacle to it's obtaining a patient hearing. You will thus rescue the best gift of Heaven to a benighted world from all the obloquy that is cast upon it under colour of these misconceptions. When these main obstructions are once got over, you may hope to find the long-sought avenue to the unbeliever's heart no longer inaccessible.

You must have observed that I have all along attributed to the rejecters of the
light

light of the gospel, whom you wish to reclaim, a degree of candour, and power of patient attention, that not many, in truth, of these gentry are supposed to possess. Let not us, however, betray a culpable defect of equity, on our part, by denying that some persons of this pitiable description may occur, whom not so much depravity of heart as an unfortunate combination, or more involuntary distraction of ideas first drove into Scepticism, and thence into Infidelity. A restless turn of mind may impel them to dispute with regret what they secretly acknowledge it would be their happiness to see established as a certain truth. It is upon these alone that the mode of expostulation, just recommended, is likely to produce any salutary effect. Some close observation will be requisite to enable you justly to discriminate between these, and those pretenders to free-thinking, whose prepossession against all good principles arises from a cause in which the will is more concerned, and the understanding over-ruled by an obstinate self-delusion, unacknowledged, and often scarcely known to themselves. They may chuse to remain in the dark, with
 respect

respect to the real source of their prejudice against the gospel, that arraigns their moral conduct. In the prospect of becoming nothing after death, they purposely forego the glorious hopes of the true Christian, that they may shun the dread of a future judgment. Whether they receive them or not, you are by profession engaged to call their attention to the clear unclouded light of these celestial truths, that their feeble sight may be neither dimmed nor dazzled by the false colouring of human art.

In a divine revelation of the most blessed, yet most awful tidings, that Providence ever sanctioned, by a particular interposition, to the sons of men, thus expressly shewn to be adapted to extirpate all the distracting doubts and terrors of superstition, they can no longer find any thing to deride, as approving the very follies, which you will shew they visibly explode. You will declare it is grossly misunderstood, wherever it is not seen to answer this excellent purpose. Let the groaning presses, long burthened with the pestilent virulence of inveterate polemical

mical trash, utter their complaints unnoticed. But if rudely intruded on us, they call out for us to join the rage, in concert with them, of their pretended orthodoxy, let us return * the suitable reply of the acute Chillingworth to the railing accusation of an ungentle Popish opponent:—"You impute to me, that the method I take and recommend is destructive only; and that I build up, or buttress nothing, that appears to be crumbling. This I take to be not a fault: for the Christian religion is not now to be built, or buttressed. I only desire to have the lumber and rubbish taken off, which you have most impertinently laid upon it, and which hides the glorious simplicity of it from those who would otherwise be disposed to embrace it."—Though a stubborn deifier of the distinguishing tenet of his own sect or party, whether Arian or Athanasian, Popish or Protestant, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Arminian or Calvinist, Anabaptist, Moravian or Swedenborgian, might then, and may still, be provoked to fresh invectives, by the li-

* *Sed mitius aliquantulo.* I quote from memory.

beral sentiments of a Chillingworth, a Hoadly, a Watson, every consistent adherent to the true principle of the Reformation must perceive that it is only by a placid renunciation on all sides, of the absurd claim of absolute exemption from defect, that we should put an end to the contagious passions, the factions and dis-tempered heats, that render schisms immortal.

It is thus, and thus alone that you will disarm them at once of their most offensive weapon. Every imputation they cast on religion, to which the feuds of her false friends give too much countenance, you will have clearly and completely obviated. You will always be well prepared to incline them to feel at least, if not to acknowledge, the fatal occasion that ensnared them insensibly into a crime so abhorrent to nature and reason, as the rejection of their supreme good with insult and mockery. You may elucidate the charge by a direct appeal to their own conscience. The cause in question will be there most easily discernible. It will
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most commonly be exactly such as you have seen it indicated in the tenor of the prophecy inserted in the commencement of this Address, and the description of the scoffers there condemned. They are men "walking after their own ungodly lusts."

CHAPTER V.

The impious Mockers.

SECTION I.

Source of impious Mockery.

A Little observation of their general conduct will be sufficient to admit you to the insight required into their real characters. The latent source of their aversion to the precepts first, and then to the doctrines of our holy religion, will instantly discover itself to open view. —“These are they,” says our sacred guide, in the sentence following the words just quoted, “which separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit.” These are the men, who reject the sure promise
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of eternal glory; for what? For the mere indulgence of brutal appetite, for the gratification of a frothy vanity, for a paltry temporal interest. So addicted are they to mere animal life, that every thing spiritual to them is nothing. Inured themselves to every evil custom, to every fashionable folly, they shun the converse of the decent, wise and virtuous, folks whom nobody knows. They frequent the haunts of those only, whose habits approve them known and knowing in the modes of what they call life, whose manners quite disengaged from all that is truly commendable, are aptly suited to countenance their phrenzy, to abet them in railing or laughing at every thing that is serious or sacred.

Their profane mockery hence appears to be excited by perverted passions, to which religion applies restraint, and salutary correction. It is no wonder then their disaffection to it, heightened by severe and just reproach and contradiction, should settle at length in a rooted and inveterate hatred. With inward dread and horror, they would fain extinguish,

what they affect in vain to hold in contempt, all idea of a seriously dreaded adversary, that arraigns their conduct, that will bring them to trial, to judgment, to a sure condemnation for their vicious practices. It is practical not reasoning infidelity, that disqualifies them from applying their hearts unto wisdom. Revelation speaks much of the loving-kindness of the Lord. But the contemplation of it is awfully glorious. "There is mercy, it says, with thee:" But it adds, "therefore shalt thou be feared." No glad tidings does it convey to them. An internal sense of their habitual aversion to perform the conditions upon which they are announced, conscious guilt, unworthiness, and obduracy of temper impel them to slight and insult what they dare not hope to propitiate to themselves.

The blessed scriptures * "were given for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Thus they are less adapted to their fashionable taste than their

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

own profane and vain babbling. The wisdom of the Lord " is great *, and sought out of all those who have pleasure therein." But what pleasure have they in the Lord or his wisdom, who, according to Solomon, " despising, destroying, hating their own souls †," give themselves wholly up to modish extravagance and licentiousness? What leisure has the mind respectfully to listen to the calm and solemn voice of holy truth, while engaged in a perpetual bustle of worldly pursuits; when tossed to and fro in a giddy round of dissipation, when entangled in the cabals of a faction, when shackled in the trammels of court-intrigue, when distracted in the maze of a false philosophy, when eagerly intent on subtle schemes of iniquitous commerce? What hope can you form of raising any pious, generous, or noble sentiments in the breast of that man, whose groveling affections are all centered in the selfish views of ambition or avarice? What appropriate language can you find to converse with one who is hackneyed in

* Ps. cxi. 2.

† v. Prov. passim,

the mysterious cant, empiricism, and chicanery of professions, useful and honourable in themselves, but sinking deservedly into discredit, when exercised by men whose practices degrade them into a paltry traffick? When the heart is shrivelled to a point, within it's little self, what power less than infinite shall expand, or render it susceptible of the august ideas, which demand it's earnest and most devout attention in the word of God?

The same attachment to corrupt regards, the same compliance with prevailing wickedness, the same prejudice against just reproof, occasioned all the ill-treatment, unbelief and hardness of heart, which our merciful Redeemer and divine Instructor met with upon earth, among the leading ranks especially of the Jewish people. He clearly discerned, and in condemning, pitied the wilful blindness, that disposed them to deride and reject the words of truth and soberness, which being opposed to their interested views, and prevailing corruption of manners, they affected to slight, as the weakness of a narrow mind, and to repel as
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the traiterous devices of a designing hypocrite, or the dangerous effusions of a dis-tempered brain. That they laboured themselves under this most dreadful of all maladies is manifest. The sole purport of his mission was to secure their true happiness both in time and eternity. A more flagrant proof of their insanity there could not be than their opprobrious rejection of it. Unhappily for them, the sole indispensable qualification required to obtain the proffered blessing, was that command over themselves, that integrity of character, that unfeigned humility and piety, to which the whole tenor of their sentiments and conduct was most averse.

SECTION II.

Progress.

PURSUE your inquiry still in the same track. You will find the cause of Infidelity still the same, in all succeeding ages. All opposition to true religion has been carried

carried on by men of the same character, down to the present times, when we so confidently boast that Christianity is better understood, than it appears to have formerly been, in the long interval of penal darkness. It must be admitted, (however the taint of ancient bigotry, or modern enthusiasm still resists the cleansing efforts of sound criticism and impartial judgment,) that the purity of it's doctrines, and the excellency of it's precepts, having been more accurately and completely sifted, are confirmed by sedate reflection, and mature experience. How far this age is peculiarly involved in the complicated guilt of holding the truth in unrighteousness, or sinning against a clearer conviction of mind; how far mankind betrays, (as you have heard it foolishly asserted,) the more impiety or unconcern for the displeasure of God, the sublimer notions it is taught to entertain of the beneficent decrees of his Providence, you will not, if you are wise, waste much of your breath in peremptorily deciding. This nation, it is said most gravely, and in sober sadness, is the more particularly noted for unruly and licentious habits,

bits, perverted principles, and extreme profligacy of morals, the more curiously it has learned to define and scrutinize the *rights of man*, the authority of equal laws, and the grounds of distributive justice. This is a point which, if you will condescend to listen to the dispassionate counsel of an aged "Caryl of other times," you will do well coolly to investigate. Ponder it, compare and examine it fairly, and I trust you will not rashly urge it, in compliance with a too customary mode of pulpit-eloquence, a splenetic, and indiscriminate censure of the age.

It is your proper office, an indispensable duty of your profession, to form just notions, and a true estimate of the prevailing manners, as far at least as concerns the souls committed to your care. By performing this with attention and due reflection, you will acquire a talent, (as rare, let me assure you, in the third generation backward, as it is in this,) of thinking and speaking, without prejudice, of whatever information is, in various ways,

• Ossian.

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conveyed to you, of the external face of the moral world. Your opinions struck out from the clash of contradictory evidence, in part, though not altogether fictitious, from the current prints and pamphlets, from the lying blasts of party rancour or adulation, will otherwise be tainted with a contagion, at present allowed to be epidemical. You will judge and pronounce at random, and consequently seldom right, upon what you have not properly considered. The alarms and lamentations of the implicit believer may have contributed as much to deceive you, as the presumptuous boasts of the reasoning infidel. It has already been remarked, that great is the advantage, which the latter is sure to take of the terror and despondency, expressed by the former at the supposed increase and rapid progress of irreligion.

It is possible the caution repeatedly hinted, not to be too hasty in passing a positive sentence upon the reports of the growing depravity of the times may excite a petulant unbeliever shrewdly to misapply the purport of this humble hint.

Disguising

Disguising a sarcastic sneer under an affected compliment to its candour:—
 “ You are certainly right, he will say, in suspending your judgment, till you are better acquainted with us. Very pitiful mistakes your brethren, the despicable satellites of corrupt establishments, civil and ecclesiastical, are always spitefully making of us free spirits, of whom they really know nothing. Most horrid wretches, they are obligingly pleased to pronounce us all. It were silly to deny we have some profligate incorrigible dogs amongst us, whom we approve as little as you can do. But in what tribe of mortals, of what persuasion, denomination, or profession, do not vicious and abandoned characters too much abound? Bid them be as candid as you appear to be, and confess that amongst you many are seen, mighty religious in theory, strict in conformity to your empty forms, but in practice as immoral, as notoriously stained with crimes of the blackest dye, as the vilest of us, whom they delight in branding with opprobrious titles. They might easily, on the other hand,

hand, be convinced, with a little less of party-bias, and a more liberal intercourse with good company, that is, with us who know mankind, that we can boast, however libertine and licentious they stile us, in theory, of many amongst us, more orderly in their lives, more passionate admirers of virtue, more ardent promoters of all that contributes to the pleasure and comfort of society in this visible world, than they who take such ill-dissembled pains to put us out of conceit with it. Who can mistake their sly purpose of engrossing it to themselves alone, whilst they think to amuse us, by solemnly turning up their eyes to that invisible world of their own creating?"

In reply to this pert apostrophe, you will make no scruple of agreeing with him in declaring an equal abomination of the alledged false pretences of these *mock-religionists*, who grossly immoral in their lives, can be impudently ostentatious of their religious notions. But as this imputed insincerity of their professions may be deemed equivocal, from the
liableness

liableness of weak mortals to act contrary to conviction, you will have occasion here to trace the fatal steps, down which men are driven by perverted passions to deny, in works, that God, whom in words they profess to revere. You may remind him, at the same time, that the world, of which he vaunts his extraordinary knowledge, as it exhibits many a flagrant instance of the sanctified impostors he so justly reprobates; so it sometimes, and not unfrequently, presents to our perplexed speculation a set of hypocrites of an opposite cast. He may perhaps himself be one, in whom are blended the unnatural contradictions of those who appear wantonly to court the disesteem of man, and brave the vengeance of God; who make a shew of being governed by principles of most pernicious tendency, while the controlling influence of a better nature, of habits happily contracted, or of some benign, though unacknowledged actuating principle, within their breasts, prompts them perpetually to counteract the dangerous tenets, they seek to recommend.

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Of the many and varied shapes, which Infidelity and Libertinism have been represented as assuming in the foregoing pages, I have chosen to close this imperfect sketch with the two last exhibited, as they are perhaps the most liable to fall under your cognizance at this day, being most adapted to the prevailing temper of the times. Allow me to subjoin one brief hint more, upon the readiest method of obviating their pernicious currency.—In the former, figures most conspicuously the New Philosopher, or Reasoning Infidel, who boasts his “superior devotion to Virtue and the happiness of mankind upon earth above us religionists.”—You must make him sensible of the infinite advantage he has given you over him by his own plea. Is it not the cause of Virtue itself you are maintaining, in the presence of an all-seeing Judge, whose authority his system openly defies? Is it not to the All-Righteous Sovereign, in whose gracious will subsists the essence of all virtue, the sole foundation of that happiness of mankind, which he affects a passionate ardour to promote, that you are soliciting in vain his due respect?

respect? — As to the latter, the servile disparager of his own better nature, who in complaisance to the humour of his profane associates, chuses to put on the hideous vizard of ungodliness, while inwardly he believes and trembles: you may at any time lead him to facilitate himself your conquest over him. You have a faithful ally in his breast, his Conscience. Bid him reflect one moment upon what he can see well enough, if he pleases, on which side lies his truest interest, the ground of his most important hopes and fears. If you can but engage him to lay it to heart, you have, with a word, and at an instant, reclaimed, and snatched him from perdition.

SECTION III.

Present Height.

YOU hear it often said, "that the world grows wiser and worse every day;" or in other words, that man grows indeed more knowing, but in the same proportion,

proportion, like the first of the species, at his fall, grows visibly more wicked. Examine it well, before you presume to determine the truth of this two-fold assertion, or how far either part of it is applicable to this turbulent close of the eighteenth century. These are points, upon which, if I mistake not, every one of you will differ from another, and often too from himself, as the ever-varying prismatic tints of party-prejudice, ecclesiastical or civil, are cast upon the subject. Can it be truly said that the characteristics of the present age are profound knowledge, or *sound* thinking, or have proportionable degrees of shallowness been consequent upon their confessedly wider diffusion? Boundless Curiosity is declared to be a distinguished feature of it's character. But is exact information the general or actual result of a restless, ill-directed solicitude of inquiry? *Free* thinking and speaking indeed will not be denied it, if freedom be meant from all the old restraints of decency.

Far be it from your Addresser to esteem himself a competent judge how far the
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the accusation is justly laid, that the world is ready to cast off all the salutary checks, which religion enforces on the heart of man. Yet he may with confidence assert that as far as the uncontrolled licentiousness, the epidemic frenzy of continual dissipation actually prevails, so far it has drawn off the minds of men from all sobriety of reflection. It has thus rendered it, in various degrees, disqualified to bestow the attention due to the awful and transcendently glorious objects, to which Christianity directs our views, beyond this contracted span of life. Here all it's prospects are briefly terminated. So far then too surely the most exalted faculties of the rational soul are narrowed and depressed; so far it's most generous affections, it's noblest energies are brought to nought. These confessedly appear to be the natural effects of the increase of Infidelity from the causes before specifically assigned. But here let me turn your attention to a joint consideration of high importance. Recollect that Superstition formerly, in a far greater degree than at present, degraded the human soul as much below it's natural state, as

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Religion

Religion was adapted to exalt humanity to an elevation and dignity infinitely above itself.

The advantage we now enjoy, in this respect, above our predecessors, cannot be doubted. Does it counterbalance the damage done in the demolition of the mould, unskilfully reared by them against the overflowing of all ungodliness? This question it is your duty earnestly to examine, impartially to weigh: How far is the rash spirit of Libertinism, now reported to rage so fatally amongst us, caught from the contagion of our lawless and distracted neighbours, daily spreading more and more to a desperate extent? To your sedulous inquiry you must add sedate reflection, before you can pronounce with judgment upon a point neither obvious, nor of easy determination. It is naturally connected with the following: How far has the apparently encreasing multitude of free-thinkers and free-speakers injured or befriended the cause of genuine piety and real virtue, the supreme glory of our nature, against Superstition and Hypocrisy, the vilest

vilest degraders of it? Never perhaps before, since the world began, were the latter held in more general contempt. Never were the dissembling zealots for religion, and professors of rigid purity, when discovered in fact to be the most baneful and treacherous enemies of both, dragged forth so resolutely into open day, and exposed to public disdain and detestation, as at this time. In consequence of a diligent and severe scrutiny, it is now generally understood how enormous a degree of impiety and vice may be concealed under the specious disguise of sanctity, or the delusive boast of patriotism and public spirit. Upon the truth or falsehood however, of these fair pretences, often impenetrable to all but the omnipresent eye of God, it becomes not us, in any individual case, but imperfectly explored, to pronounce a positive decision.

Upon one consideration let the anxious heart of the faithful Christian, and the loyal well-wisher to our justly admired constitution in church and state securely rest: that nothing can more contribute

to advance the interests both of true religion and the public weal, than the full disclosure to the public indignation of every species of iniquity and fraud. The most unfailing test, the readiest substitute for an Ithuriel's spear, which I can recommend to you, is this: Imposture and Falshood will become instantly visible, starting up in their own proper shape, upon a suitable application of the following experiment. When after a close acquaintance with a man, or a studious observation of his ruling principle of action, you have noted it to be constantly self-centered in his own personal gratification or emolument, whatever specious appearances he may put forth, in the main drift, or shifting turns of his conduct, private or public, whatever plausible shews he may exhibit of devotion to God, of zeal for sacred truth, of affection to the man he calls his friend, of steadiness to his party, of loyalty to his Sovereign, or passionate ardour for his country, you can incur no risque of a mistake in pronouncing him an arrant cheat, whose callous breast, no religious, generous or patriotic emotion has ever touched. Of

the several tribes here indicated of subtle impostors the wonted success has of late been rendered more liable to be checked than heretofore, by the forcible spirit of scrutiny, which a gracious Providence appears to have sent forth, purposely to awaken the whole human race from a lethargic torpor, of more deadly consequence, in a moral respect, than all the turbulence, to which, by a severe, but salutary decree, it may have given rise. With humility resign to heaven, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, the solution of this intricate knot. Confess your own inability to calculate the preponderant benefit to mankind of the detection of each abominable species of fraud above the temporary mischief, occasioned by the jarring passions, which it may, for a while, inflame to phrenzy.

Be not too peremptory in asserting the general tendency of the present age to apostatize from real Christianity, or obedience to legal Government, till you are able to ascertain it's greater deficiency in every branch of useful knowledge, natural or critical, religious or moral.

With

With regard to it's disputed pretensions to superior Wisdom, your humble Adviser, before he presumes to give a direct answer to the question himself, begs leave to refer you to the opinion delivered by a celebrated Prelate, * upon the causes of free thinking, under the auspicious reign of the good Queen Anne, as he and his friends, *after her death*, (obliquely glancing at her successor,) were usually pleased to call her. Take it in the illustrious Berkeley's dignified and emphatical mode of expressing his sentiments, which would ill become one, whom a continual residence in a petty hamlet has long estranged from a familiar intercourse with the *world* there described. "I imagine," says this great man, possessed of *every virtue under heaven* †, humility perhaps excepted, "I imagine that thinking is the grand *desideratum* of the present age; and the real cause of whatever is amiss, may justly be reckoned the general neglect of education, in

* See his Alciphron, at the close of that admirable work.

† So extolled by Pope.

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those who need it most, the people of fashion. What can be expected, when those who have *the most influence, have the least sense*, and those who are sure to be followed, set the worst example? Where youth so uneducated are yet so forward; where modesty is esteemed pusillanimity, and a deference to years, knowledge, religion, laws, want of sense and spirit: such untimely growth of genius, could not have been valued and encouraged by the wise men of antiquity; whose sentiments on this point are so ill-suited to the genius of our times, that it is to be feared modern ears could not bear them. But however ridiculous such maxims might appear to our British youth, who are so capable, and so forward to try experiments, *and mend the constitution of their country*, I believe it will be admitted by men of sense, that if the governing part of mankind would in these days, for experiment's sake, consider themselves in that old Homeric light, as *Pastors of the People*, whose duty it was to improve their flock, they would soon find that this is to be done by an education very different

ferent from the modern, and otherguels maxims, than those of the Minute Philosophy. And those who, in their own minds, their health, or their fortunes, feel the cursed effects of a wrong one, would do well to consider, they cannot better make amends for what was amiss in themselves, than by preventing the same in their posterity."

This judgment the Right Reverend Censor could pass upon what we have been accustomed, from the constellation of great wits, who then shone forth all at once, to regard as the bright Augustan æra of Britain. If the sharpness of this indignant Reprover of an age, which, as you may be told, was less corrupt and vicious than the present, should not exactly suit your taste, you will be apt to remind me that there appeared, at times, in the good Bishop, a *quiddam subinane*, a certain over-weening consciousness of super-eminent talents, caught perhaps by contagion from the familiar stile of disdainful pride, so offensively affected by his renowned associates in mutual applause,

plause, Pope, Swift, and Bolingbroke. The last especially, to whom too much honour is done, by naming him with three far worthier men, was most ridiculously guilty of this haughty impertinence. Their self-admiration, it is true, kept them in the constant habit of holding the times they lived in, and all mankind except themselves, in sovereign contempt. To disgust us of this insolent humour in heroes, whom we have been taught to look up to, as almost *super human*, (an epithet often more fillily applied,) we daily hear the same arrogant and splenetic language from pitiable wretches indeed, in comparison of them. These overweening vaunts are most preposterous, yet far most frequent, in the mouths of persons of intellectual endowments considerably under par, while men of superior understanding and sound religion are well aware that good sense and true piety are invaluable gifts, which kind Heaven, or the grace of God, has not so partially distributed, as conceited wits or zealots have fondly imagined. Those especially, we may be sure, have not the largest share of either, who are loudest in expressing

sing their extreme horror at the present rage of examination of every sort.

Let inbred humility, and the decent dignity of your profession teach you more candour in thought, as well as in speech. Does it not, after all, betray a scanty portion of knowledge, and a vain disregard of better information, to disallow the manifest advantages we enjoy, at this day, naturally conducive to improvement in the human mind and manners? Can it be questioned, whether many of the prejudices of bigotry, which had so long held the mental faculties of man in shameful trammels, which were even subversive of the fundamental principles of all sound morality, are in great measure, though not completely shaken off? Shall we hesitate to say that a more exact and impartial research into the genuine text itself of holy scripture, and a consequent rejection of the peremptory mode of interpreting some of the most obscure passages of it, formerly more in use, has cleared our conceptions of the doctrines there supposed to be revealed, relative to the points, which have kindled un-

tinguished feuds among Christians, all in one respect, in uncharitableness, alike heretical?

However we may deplore the mischiefs arising from these unnatural feuds on controverted points, where the several parties were all acknowledged to be alike in the dark, we have learnt from experience, that even with respect to them, the result of impartial and patient investigation is generally auspicious to the cause of truth. Inextricable difficulties occurring constantly in such researches, to confound the disputants, have happily rebated the edge of all the weapons used improperly in these interminable contests. They have certainly lowered the imposing tone of many a haughty dogmatist, by exposing him repeatedly to the mortification of a tacit avowal of his own self-defeat, when pressed by the merciless requisition to explain his meaning, which his triumphant adversary the Sceptic urges with the keenest mockery. While solemn Dulness vanishes abashed from the random shafts of laughing Ignorance, considerable advantage may accrue
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to the interests of Truth. Their blind attacks will never reach that system of eternal truths, which subsisted “* before the day was, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the world was made, that shall endure from everlasting to everlasting.” When it shall please God to establish them in their primitive simplicity, all eyes shall discern, all tongues proclaim, all hearts unite in exploding the impotence of impiety. The delight in confusion, which the mole-eyed progeny, present or future, of the Shaftesburys and Bolingbrokes, Voltaires and Humes, Paines and Volneys, may still pursue, in their ever-restless wanderings from doubt to doubt, will be there alone perpetuated, where the disastrous wars of mystical theology shall be still maintained.

It is not said that all contention will cease at once, where nothing is brought into discussion but what may easily be made intelligible to a plain understanding, informed with a docile temper. No: one

* Psalm xc. 2.

root of bitterness will still spring up. Until man's whole nature shall be created anew, it will never be totally extirpated. The immediately present example of that supremely gracious Lord, that meek and humble Master, who washed his servants feet, was not sufficient to controul it. Behold the simple-minded disciples of Jesus, how admirably instructed in lowliness ! Yet “ * *the strife arose, even amongst them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*” It was a point that bore no relation to any article of his doctrine, of which the interpretation, by the perversity of human learning, could be wrested to involve the slightest difficulty. The subject was manifestly such as we must needs think they could not fail to see was contradictory to the tenor of his life, the spirit of all his discourses.

Be ingenuous for once, ye vehement flickers for what you cannot call your *doctrines*, for about those very controverted points, on which you lay the greatest

* Luke xxii. 24.

stress, you dare not pretend you can *teach* us any thing. Is all your zeal at last for tenets avowedly inexplicable? Are you aware of the consequence of tempting men, by a declaration of their assent to these, to violate sincerity, a principle indispensibly requisite to give credit and stability to every moral virtue, which alone can render man susceptible of any spiritual grace? Let it not be said that it is for the assertion or display of some undue ascendant over the ordinary understandings of men, that you seek to bind upon their conscience, by the direst anathemas, the necessity of assenting to what can no more be clearly collected from the word of God, than that most glaring practical absurdity of Popery, Transubstantiation, thus defined by Dr. W. Bishop of Landaff, "the * *mixing* a little flower and water into the substance of the Incomprehensible God!"

Be not apprehensive of your being invited here to direct your steps, or of my being disposed to wander with you over the

* Might not *converting* be here the proper word?

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vast and dreary field of Polemical Divinity, into which the wily adept in the New Philosophism is always glad to see you rambling astray, never doubting to catch you entangled within the reach of his masked batteries of ridicule.—To you, my more ingenuous young Friends, I am now better pleased to renew my affectionate Address. If compelled to a disheartening study, enjoined to you, with great solemnity, by persons who have often little stomach for it themselves, very soon will a little serious application to it induce you to contemplate, with deep regret, the disastrous twilight, it has shed through ages past, which, alas! it is shedding still, upon the blessed revelation of the Gospel of Christ: "*Quale per incertam lunam, sub luce malignâ est iter in sylvis.*"—Let me persuade you now to turn, with recovered comfort, an impartial eye upon the better hope afforded you of seeing it less disgraced than heretofore by implacable animosity and unintelligible jargon.

As a preliminary article to our bringing this hateful wordy war to a desirable close: Let us suppose every contentious phrase

phrase of questionable import, unwarranted by scriptural use, expunged for ever from the pulpit dialect, and canonical vocabulary. Attend to the blessed consequence. These dire alarm-bells being silenced once for all, could no longer excite us to break the bonds of brotherly affection. In these delightful bonds the beneficent force of nature had originally linked our hearts. It was equally adverse to the sullen calumny of the crabbed Hobbist, and the fiery zeal of the brain-sick Bigot. The primitive spirit of the gospel confirmed and cherished this natural union. But amidst the rage of controversy, the voice of either is heard no more. When impelled by the fatal sound of these signals to prepare for battle, mercy on us! what a spectacle do the wretched combatants present to the poignant ridicule of a Shaftesbury, or the dull fleers of his later counterfeits! Impotent indeed, in his immediate attacks on religion itself, was all his wit, however embellished with the gloss of art and splendid eloquence. And surely, from the gross ignorance, and disgusting ribaldry of his baser mimicks of this day, either
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in rags or embroidery, in night-cellars or in fashionable clubs, it can sustain no lasting injury. It has unluckily more, much more to apprehend from the misconceptions, and unchristian sentiments of many of it's pretended advocates. It is against these enthusiasts for such unexplained and truly undefinable tenets, that the scoffers inveigh, with ever-sure success.

Let not the discomfiture of the one, or exultation of the other disturb you. No disservice to religion and truth is done by the triumphs of Infidelity over bigotry and absurdity. Over whom, after all, are they obtained? Over men, whom a misguided party-zeal has driven to wrest the scriptures, and press them to abet their unchristian warfare against christian charity, no less than against reason. Let us candidly suppose they are not aware themselves how much their sentiments and conduct are at enmity against both: for we must not copy their reproachful mode of disputation, by imputing to them wilful error. It affords some presumption in favour of their

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sincere conviction of the propriety of their most absurd positions, that when their potent adversary, Common-Sense, has exposed to open day their glaring inconsistencies, they still persist in disavowing the most palpable evil consequences, which to all unprejudiced eyes are connected by strict necessity with their tenets: though the main tenor of the holy text be well ascertained, and it be clearly demonstrated their misconstructions are directly contradictory to it.

The general charge, here indicated, might be left to your diligent investigation particularly to apply. But as mere hints, without some specification, may be often misapplied, or slighted, as vague and declamatory, allow me to direct your attentive notice to some unlucky phrases, which are now complained of, as giving occasion to those conflicts, which are still bringing great discredit to the cause of religion.—It is well known to all serious inquirers, who are a little conversant in the history of religious opinions, in the two last centuries especially, that certain captious peculiarities of speech,
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and the doctrines, they have been invented to express, having never been exactly defined, or clearly understood by the most vehement maintainers of them, have continually been, and will probably ever be involved in fresh perplexity, at every new contention. Bestow, if you can, an hour's patient hearing to a Supra- and a Sub-lapsarian expounding their opposite notions of the consequences of the *Original Sin* of our first parents. A consolatory term, of most auspicious and propitiatory import surely, was introduced, with the gracious intention of mitigating the dread of those general ill consequences. *Atonement*, without improper application, could not naturally be a word adapted to divide the hearts of Christians. It occurs but once in the version of the new testament, sanctioned and approved by long use, and church-authority. It is in the epistle to the Romans, chap. v. 11; where it is produced with a sort of apparent impropriety, *Καταλλαγῇ* might better have been rendered *Reconciliation*, as in the preceding verse, *καταλλαγῆμεν* is justly translated, "we were reconciled." It was by the

sacred writer deemed expedient to remove the general prejudice of his countrymen against a suffering Messiah. He did this naturally by an allusion and figure analogous to the sacrificial rite of the Mosaic institution, by means of which the mercy and forgiveness of an offended God were represented as ordained to be extended to repentant sinners.

To a certain qualified sense of this term, *Atonement*, some of the most esteemed writers of our established church, by their frequent use of it, have given a respected countenance. But it has been grossly abused, not only to support absurdity, as you know, by our itinerant preachers, but to palliate the most palpable contradictions to the moral law of Christ. Attend with a calm and impartial judgment to the heterodox and dissonant tenets, which they are continually starting up, from a perverted use of the words, *imputed righteousness, election, reprobation, predestination absolute; free grace*, in particular, applied to maintain that man is purely passive, in his moral and religious conduct, his conversion
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from sin to godliness, or "working out his own salvation." More absurdly still is the phrase, *absolute reprobation* misapplied in a sense declaratory of an arbitrary doom to crimes inevitable, and everlasting misery, by the sole operation, and irresistible agency of the divine will.

Many excellent men of exemplary piety, and a pacific spirit, have laboured to vindicate the use of these phrases in a modified and duly soften'd sense. By a latitude of interpretation, to which no considerate friend to the establishment can with consistency object, they have explained them as expressive of doctrines, differing *toto cælo* from those we have in view, which every mind impressed with a truly filial reverence for the kind Father of the universe must reject with invincible abhorrence. The dreadful tenets of certain separatists from the congregations and ministry of our Established Church, are but too familiar to their misguided followers. To it's holy Scriptures, it's Articles, it's Liturgy, they profess exclusively to adhere, alone to understand, or interpret aright; whilst

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in a perverted sense they are brought to countenance their bitter invectives against its best and most enlightened members, who persevere in vindicating by the greatest accuracy of critical investigation, and soundest argument, their mode of expounding the sacred writings according to their pure and genuine spirit. How perfectly consonant to the gracious doctrines of our Blessed Saviour, to the whole tenor of the glad tidings, which he was commissioned to announce, of mercy to all mankind, is his declaration, that this is the First and Great Commandment; Thou shalt love the Lord thy God? Is it credible to reason, that with those enthusiasts, especially with the most worthily respected man amongst them, (W. W.) the frequent boast should be, that they alone "*look unto Jesus?*" Let us hope that notwithstanding these transient fallies are occasionally vented by those, who deeming themselves alone elect and righteous, devoutly consign the whole human race besides to eternal perdition, let us hope they also may, at some serener interval, be reclaimed to a due faith in the everlasting Gospel, in the

the merciful decree, proclaimed by our most benign Legislator and Judge himself. No more let those, who call themselves men, unnaturally counteract the most excellent, most glorious propensity of our nature, our admiration of the supremely amiable and beneficent perfections of our Universal Father. No more, without a secret compunction, and repugnancy of spirit, let the veriest *Ranter* * labour to damp our ardour of love towards our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and constant Benefactor, who by his Son so tenderly invites us to regard him always under these endearing relations. Then may the distracting notions he derives from texts, the different purport of which has repeatedly been well explained, become hateful even to himself, by his own daily exposure of their extravagance,

* This name was given to a dismal sect of the religious overmuch, who during the Grand Rebellion under Charles the First, were called, and gloried in calling themselves the *Family of Sin*. But without thinking so ill of them, as they often declare they think of themselves, the reader may apply it to any writer or preacher, who deals in harsh sounding gibberish, unsupported by reason, or soundness of thought.

be discountenanced for ever, or remembered no more. May he thus once for all be brought back to his sober senses. May he then happily reverse the generous maxim of the good Plutarch, the foe professed of all defamers of the divine perfections, who observes, that "what the drunken man is uttering had commonly before possession of his heart." May it be truly said that "τα ἐπὶ τῆς γλῶττις τῆ μεθύουσι" are from henceforth utterly obliterated "ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆ νηφελος." Never never will I believe that such horrid fancies could have originated first in a sober mind.

If you are unapprized unto what a degree the evident purport of the holy Scriptures, their blessed harmonizing temper are distorted by these our passionate revilers, you will be shocked to hear the following delivered as the summary of the sanctioned creed, and fundamental doctrine of the Church of England.—"By the eternally destined fall of man, an infinite penalty was incurred by one, and the imputation of his sin, affecting all, and an infinite atonement adequate to it, made

made by an infinite Being, by which means a small remnant of the human race are necessarily saved, while all the rest of mankind, including new-born children, unbelieving Jews, Mahometans and Heathens, Arians and Socinians, as destitute either of faith, or the right faith, are consigned to everlasting torments, with the Devil and his angels, from whence results glory to God, who in all this dreadful scheme, is supposed to have sought nothing else." *

This horrid system is thus delineated by an ingenious, (but uncandid) adversary to our establishment, as the only admissible sense of certain Articles, in the prescribed formulary of our public faith, though well he knows that the best approved members of our church, for soundness of argument, and accuracy of critical discernment, indignant at the unequitable imputation, have afforded us redress, in the best manner, that canonical rigour will at present permit, by

* See Dr. PRIESTLEY's Illustrations of certain Passages of Scripture. P. 64.

an opposite mode of expounding those Articles, consonant as well to common sense as to the whole tenor of our Saviour's doctrine. He knows also that the aforefaid insensate revilers of Reason, and of our most esteemed expounders of the sacred word, as furiously execrate him for exploding the tremendous notions, with which they scare their distracted auditories. To the admirers of this untoward disputant, and those his strange associates in one point only, in outrageous reproach against the most respected members of the Church of England; it may be sufficient for you to quote the Royal Declaration prefixed to the authorised formulary. It expressly asserts it "to be so conceived, that *even in those curious points, in which our differences lie, men of all sorts may take the Articles to be for them.*"

You will shew the unreasonableness of Dr. Priestley in denying to all conscientious, but peaceable conformists, a latitude in interpreting human articles, which he assumes without limitation to himself, in expounding the word of God. Far
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be it from me to question the sincerity of his attachment to what has appeared to him, *at the time*, the purity of gospel-truth. He will excuse me for adding *at the time*, since no man has more ingenuously declared the frequent variations of his sentiments, in respect to the disputable points, and the exclusive privilege he claims of varying from them, without censure, and publishing without a blush, new variations from the last, whenever he pleases. Without claiming a latitude of such exorbitant extent, we believe we may securely affirm, that no intelligent and well-instructed member of our happy establishment will contend, that it enjoins us to renounce that liberty of interpreting the prescribed form of doctrine, so benignly granted in the Royal Declaration. With those indeed, who deriving from it such opinions as shed the saddest gloom of desperation upon the blissful light, the hopeful tidings of the gospel, you may chuse to decline a fruitless discussion, that will only bring down fresh torrents of obloquy upon you and common sense. To these obstinate sticklers for what they are pleased

pleased to call the primitive and orthodox interpretation of the Articles, it may be sufficient, by the way, to drop the following hint.—It is under their defenceless outworks to a citadel, the natural strength of which might for ages unimpaired withstand the utmost skill of the most expert engineers of infidelity, that they are ever making their most dangerous approaches to undermine it.

The time will come, when among religionists, of every denomination, those only excepted, who still maintain a stubborn war against poor human reason, against all the natural sentiments of humanity, it will be generally accounted indispensibly requisite to exhibit the Father of the Universe in that his true character, which all nature, as well as the consonant testimony of scripture, every where proclaims; as a God, “whose tender mercies are over his works.”—who, “* though he correcteth the sinful man, it is with judgment, and not in anger,” —“that he may humble him, and prove

* Jer. x. 24.

him,

him, to do him good at the latter end ;”
 —who though “ he continueth his loving
 kindness, without ceasing, to them alone
 who know him, and to the upright in
 heart. * ;—“ he is nevertheless not willing
 that any should perish; but that all should
 come to repentance.”—No longer then
 shall the christian world, even where the
 antisciptural, (though ancient,) vague
 phraseology may perhaps be still in use;
 no longer then, without the manifested in-
 dignation of all thinking men, shall the
 God of Christ be announced to them as
 an unjust and malignant tyrant, or an ar-
 bitrary and capricious being, dooming,
 by his own eternal and express decree, an
 indefinite number, an immense majority
 of mankind, to endless misery. No longer
 then, without incurring that open con-
 tempt of the very weakest of the multi-
 tude, in which the wisest have always held
 his principles, shall a misconceiving
 preacher of the gospel of peace, endea-
 vour to excite us to a perpetual enmity
 against those, whom he impiously con-
 demns as the adversaries of God, as

• 2 Peter iii. 9.

wretches by him predestined to everlasting punishment, for what unexpiable guilt? — For that which he pronounces the direst of all damnable crimes, the presumption to differ in opinion from *Him*, the self-constituted Apostle to the chosen few, the sole worthy ‘*to name the name of Christ.*’ The penalty decreed to this presumption will not be mitigated, it will be aggravated yet the more, if in one point, (not at all essential indeed with him,) we are acknowledged to be more zealous and exemplary than himself, in ‘departing from iniquity;’ especially if we exasperate his rage against us, by telling him with St. Paul; “* It is on this point the foundation of God standeth sure, by this seal the Lord knoweth them that are his.”

A judicious yet pious investigation, an accurate yet candid criticism have rescued at length from gross misinterpretation those passages of scripture, which the delusive sophistry of men had, for many ages past, perversely wrested into la-

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

mentable nonsense. They have defeated alike the absurdity of the bigot, and the mockery of the infidel by rendering these at once intelligible, only by restoring them to their original meaning. St. Peter expressly indicates who are the persons chiefly perplexed and led astray by a perversion of the plain sense of scripture. The difficulties it creates affect most perniciously * the unteachable, (*ἀνιδεοί*) and unsteady, (*ἀσπίκτοι*) the men, whose prejudices indispose them for admitting the truth, or whose levity and inconsistency prevent their due solicitude to retain it. They have less dangerous effects on persons of docile and humble dispositions, diligent in seeking, and steadfast in maintaining the true doctrine of Christ.

The remedy prescribed by the Apostle is not that which was ironically suggested by the exquisitely keen and ingenious Dr. Hare, to his indolent brethren, purposely to shame and goad them to a

* 2 Pet. iii. 16. The unlearned and unstable, says our authorized version.

study too scandalously neglected : it was not to lay the scriptures aside, as attended with "*difficulties and discouragements*" unfurmountable ; it was not that, which has lately been so preposterously followed by the most shameless abettor of modern infidelity, who after being convicted of grossly abusing what he had never read, took it up at last by his own confession, for the sole intent of seeking some apology for his former ignorant obloquy.—The precept of St. Peter, and of plain good sense is this : to exert an earnest application "** and to grow in grace,*" or to advance from one stage of moral experience and practical piety to another, and thus to increase daily "*in the knowledge,*" or the true spirit "*of our Lord and Saviour.*"

By the term *τρεβλυσιν*, wrest, or torture, as upon the rack, St. Peter indicates that violence is done by deluded men to some passages in the sacred writings. They make them speak an unnatural sense, to support their own self-condemned and

* 2 Peter iii. 18.

shocking hypotheses. May God preserve us from all wilful blindness and obstinate prejudice against better information, that the enemies of our faith may cease to glory where alone they can gather strength from our weakness. Without arrogating to the eighteenth century a kind of merit, that certainly does not belong to it, a greater depth of erudition in the superior, as it claims a wider diffusion of it, in the subordinate ranks, than the seventeenth, when literature boasted it was cherished by Patrons, who were themselves the highest ornaments to it; both the admirers and detractors of the present times are perfectly agreed in one point. We are far less encumbered with the shackles of bigotry.

Let this be granted. But let not the unbeliever exult at his approaching triumph in the Age of *Reason*. Be you the first, ye sincerely pious Protestants, to hail the commenced dispersion of those clouds, that may still retard the returning dawn of pure evangelical light, in it's simple and primitive display. Ever thus most welcome will it be, most friendly,

most inspiriting to that excellent mental faculty, heaven's prime gift to man. To you, ye Christians in deed as well as in word, it's loud summons is now sent forth. It prompts you to a present vigorous exertion of heart and mind. It engages to conduct you with an humble yet resolute, a docile, yet persevering spirit, to the glory of concurring in the true and faithful service it owes to True Religion, of vindicating the solid indestructible foundation of it's divine establishment. Be not appalled at the fiery trial it is always prepared most chearfully to undergo. At the consumption of the superadded stubble, the corruptible structures, injudiciously raised upon it's everlasting base, feel no regret. * "The fire shall declare the work, which alone abideth," and the precious undecaying substance will shine forth, with redoubled and resistless lustre.

Be mindful still that in the execution of the great work of his mission, in the extirpation of ancient superstition, and

* 1 Cor. iii. 13.

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the prevailing profligacy of sentiments and manners, it was always to the reason of his disciples, that the Blessed Founder of our holy Faith expressly addressed his doctrines. His plain and familiar mode of delivering them evinced his benign intent, that our feeble understanding should by them be strengthened, and enlightened, not dazzled and confounded, should without any painful effort, be raised from wavering and illusive theory, to settled and constant practice. The obvious tendency of this mode of expounding his Gospel, was to bring it forth into life, as the present guide, and unerring ruler of our conduct. It is, after all, the province of calm good sense, and earnest meditation, as well of our spiritual knowledge, as our secular learning, to fulfil their important purposes in real life, without which, they are both mere sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal. If we faithfully regard them in this point of view, and apply them accordingly, they will brighten up our minds with far other prospects, than those that distract the heart of many a pious but misjudging zealot, or those, from which

the unprincipled miscreant tribes catch fallacious omens in favour of their destructive projects of universal anarchy and confusion.

Let us, without presuming to scan or to forebode the decrees of heaven, evince our sincerity in the address of our daily prayer to God, "thy kingdom come;" may the supreme excellence of thy law be fully manifested, as well by it's perfect efficacy, as it's general reception. Let us with all humility unite our assiduous endeavours to cooperate with the divinely-appointed promulgator of that law. To promote a purpose of this universal concern, you must see the expediency of clearing first away the scholastic mist cast over it by officious vanity, that it may be thus displayed in it's true light, and primitive simplicity. Some important advances have been making, from time to time, against the selfish opposition to it by the sons of darkness, since the commencement of this century. The alarm instantly caught, even in establishments founded themselves upon a like recurrence to pure and original principles,

ples, have of course engaged the indolent and timorous in perpetual enmity against what they ignorantly stile Innovation. Do these obsequious abiders by what they find thus conveniently settled to their hands, really imagine themselves precluded from all obligation to apply their own hearts with all diligence to search for wisdom in the word of God? With the coolest indifference, they declare: "*That settled formulary determined completely, above two hundred years ago, all that was necessary to make them wise unto salvation. They neither know, nor are willing to be told, what progress the needless application of learned men has made in scriptural knowledge, since the Church and State have sanctioned a system of faith, for them to subscribe, they are ready, with all due solemnity, to declare it perfect.*" Shrewdly convinced how aptly the success of all their present views is favoured by their own natural disposition to trouble their heads with nothing, which they find decided for them, they rejoice in the leisure it affords of turning their attention another way.

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To these groveling conceptions of worldly wisdom, I trust, my more liberal-minded young friends, you will not stoop to accede. Many awfully impressive lessons is Providence now dispensing to mankind, through the medium of a severe *Experience*. Must we believe the whole species to be grown so stupid, as certain libellers of human nature are pleased to represent it? In this country especially, (where by the blessing of God, the love of truth, and ardent spirit of inquiry, without running into the extravagant wildness of the New Philosophism, still maintain their place in it's distinguished character for solid good sense;) in Britain, shall it be said that we are grown so dull and spiritless as not to learn something from the wholesome discipline of this our best instructress? From the violent convulsive shocks we have felt, and are still most anxiously apprehending, from the troublous revolutions of public affairs in all the world around us, can we fail to collect this knowledge:—That Mankind are at this crisis less disposed than ever to see the same abuses perpetuated from generation to generation, which for ages have

have so often been, a thousand ways, displayed in all their deformity, which have embroiled, and endangered the safety of their peaceful establishments time out of mind? Has not many an authentic record of our past errors and follies been exposed to public view, in the bolder strains of modern historians, and had some effect in quickening our callous sense of all their evil consequences?

To these questions, which I have ventured humbly to propose for your meditation, I will not presume to deliver a definitive answer. This you shall receive, with a prospect of better success, from the masterly pen of a younger writer, who appears to have studied mankind well. —“ In every government, the stability and the influence of established authority, must depend on the coincidence between its measures and the tide of public opinion; and it appears that, in modern Europe, in consequence of the invention of printing, and the liberty of the press, public opinion has acquired an ascendant in human affairs, which it never possessed in those

those states of antiquity, from which most of our political examples are drawn. The danger indeed of *sudden and rash innovations* cannot be too strongly inculcated; and the views of those men, who are forward to promote them, cannot be reprobated with too great severity.—But it is possible also to fall into the opposite extreme; and to bring upon society the very evils we are anxious to prevent, by an obstinate opposition to those gradual and necessary reformatations, which the genius of the times demands. The violent revolutions which, at different periods, have convulsed modern Europe, have arisen, not from a spirit of innovation in Sovereigns and Statesmen; but from their *bigotted attachment to antiquated forms*; and to principles borrowed from less enlightened ages. It is this reverence for abuses, which have been sanctioned by time, accompanied by an inattention to the progress of public opinion, which has, in most instances, blinded the rulers of mankind, till government has lost all its efficiency, and till the rage of innovation has become too general and too violent

to be satisfied with changes, which if proposed at an earlier period, would have united in the support of established institutions, every friend to order, and to the prosperity of his country *."

Permit me to apply the tenor of this bold remark to the subject of our late consideration. You daily hear what horrible doctrines, at which humanity and common sense universally shudder, are, by the adversaries of our peaceable church establishment, declared to be countenanced by our prescribed formularies taken in their literal sense. These, you know, in times when free examination has declaredly had it's full scope, have not escaped, at one time, a strict and impartial; at another, a perverse and injurious discussion. Religious truth is ever ready to encounter, yea, chearfully to invite it's keenest edge. If without the latitude of interpretation, so justly claimed, yet often obstinately denied us, our imposed subscription to these forms shall be

* Prof. Dugald Stewart, Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

found not in all points conformable to the sacred standard; if a timely revival is from thence become indispensibly requisite; let us hope the desirable season for it will at length present itself, not by violent and hasty, but by regular and deliberate steps.

Surest when slow and gradual, it is commonly said, has been the progress of improvement of every sort. The time is not unmeasurably distant when, in these western parts of Europe, arts and sciences were scarcely in being: nor has our splendid embassy to the remotest eastern extremity of the globe, though it has confirmed the old reports of their supposed far remoter antiquity there, at all diminished our just wonder at the deficient advances of them, in that ingenious and celebrated nation. Their first introduction here, their tardy improvement, their partial decline, and faint revival at different periods, yet gradual progression upon the whole, we have been taught by the diligence of curious inquiry to trace, with still encreasing correctness. All the necessaries, conveniences, all that contributes
to

to the external ornament, or solid comforts of life, we are continuing to provide in greater and greater abundance and variety. Can we doubt whether in these, and other points of general concern, the world exhibits indisputable proof of a silent tendency to melioration? It's movement indeed is neither equable nor constant, like the course of the heavenly luminaries. The advances it is making are yet discernible in the enlarged contemplation of the judicious observer. To minds of this expansive cast not even the distracted present state of all nations can fail of enforcing most feelingly inestimable lessons of wisdom. The dreadful disorders and keen sufferings, which a long series of enormous blunders, and the distempered passions of lawless anarchs, though pretended legal rulers, have brought upon millions, it will be the task of future historians, it is your province, by the application of a sound theology, to present in a proper light. It is your duty, in the painful contemplation of all the present miseries brought upon mankind, by the overflowings of ungodliness, error and vice, to adore the mysterious dispensation

dispensation of an all-wise Providence, thus promoting, by a severe, but wholesome discipline, the instruction, amendment and future welfare, temporal and eternal, of a sinful race of creatures,

Lament we may the confusion and wretchedness always resulting from the conflict of discordant principles, religious and political, ordained to become the means of correcting themselves. To this conflict a certain period of duration is assigned. That period will be, when it shall have accomplished the wise purposes of Providence. With respect to the interests of true religion, the termination of these miseries will declare it's victory decisive over those, who in combating against the christian revelation will stand convicted of rebellion against reason, and reason's God, the eternal fountain of all truth. The futility of those profane boasters of their prowess, who audaciously insult and revile the gracious edicts of our heavenly Sovereign, will not be manifest to all men, until the haughty tones of imposing yet servile Dogmatism, echoed by it's implicit admirers with fury, because

because, without understanding, shall be silenced, or softened into less presumption. A concurrence on all sides, it is hoped, may then succeed in a more humble and impartial general appeal to the sacred text. It's full meaning, in every thing really necessary for man to know, for the due regulation of his spiritual concerns, will then, we trust, be no longer liable, through the perversion of purblind Sophistry, to be rendered questionable.

Whatever *heaven-taught* Reason, the sole *Catholic*, (or universally acknowledged) Vicar of Christ upon earth, has not, by it's utmost efforts, been enabled to elucidate to the apprehension of the most earnest and sincere inquirer, no mere authority of man will any longer presume to bind on the conscience of his fellow-man. Then at length, whatever controversy may still subsist, it will no longer prove a source of endless animosity, and the curse inflicted on the impious builders of Babel will be no more. When the most essential truths, which a divine sanction enforces upon the hopes and fears of all Christians of every rank, or degree
of

of mental abilities, natural or acquired, shall be unanimously determined to be those only which a common understanding, with a serious attention of heart can sufficiently apprehend: then will godliness afford us hope of accomplishing soon it's perfect work. Revelation will have no more to encounter the most fatal impediment to it's completion of it's grand purpose. Our infinite obligation to it will be no longer disputable. No more will any restraint be called for on liberty of conscience, nor will any jealous complaints molest us of an undue stretch of authority, imposing human ordinances for the divine prescriptions.

The proper expounder of the Word of God above recommended, is manifestly not that contentious *Reason*, which the Roman philosophic orator and patriot reprobates as a pernicious principle of disunion, the maintainer of the dark mystery, the baleful traffick of ambition, avarice, or vanity, among the restless tribes of polemics, political or theological. It is that "link of human society, that conciliates and knits mankind together

in a cordial union *," whose eulogy he so properly celebrates. It is constantly remarked, that the dogmatical dictators †, lately under consideration, always assume their most vehement and peremptory stile in pronouncing their judgment upon what the wisest men regard with silent awe, or expression of humble diffidence, what they well know all human intellect must labour in vain to apprehend.

In your contemplation and preaching of that gospel, which first published the establishment of glory to God on high, on earth peace, good-will towards men, you will have the grace, it is hoped, to come accompanied with that requisite aptitude to receive yourselves, and communicate it's glad tidings to others, with the primitive disposition of mind, which unites the hearts of men together in brotherly love, without racking them with needless doubts and difficulties. Were they not the docility, modesty and sim-

* *Ratio, societatis humanae vinculum, quæ conciliat inter se homines conjungitque, &c.*

Cic.

† See Chapter III. Section II.

plicity

plicity of a little child, that our Saviour pronounced to be the first qualifications to enter into the kingdom of heaven? Without that open, candid and patient spirit of inquiry indicated by Cicero, and sanctioned by an infinitely higher authority, with a present and beautifully appropriate allusion, without the amiable qualities conspicuous in the character of ingenuous childhood, you want the previous title to become the persuasive advocates of religion, truth and virtue. In that evangelical temper, from which those requisites are ever inseparable; you must behold a striking contrast to those arrogant claims of the bigoted devotees * of every sect in Christendom, who demand our impossible assent to their discordant doctrines. To a mind well disposed in meekness and humility to receive it, the Holy Spirit of God will not fail to display, in fullest evidence, the main scope and de-

* You will understand the unlearned, (or unteachable *ἀμαθεις*) and unstable, (of no fixed principle *ἀσφαλτοι*) marked out by St. Peter, are here also indicated, notwithstanding profound knowledge of scripture, and unshaken orthodoxy are their peculiar boast.

sign of that everlasting gospel, which though "*revealed unto babes*," is declared by Christ to be judicially "*hid from the*" self-deemed "*wise and prudent*."

Docility ! Meekness ! Humility !— Where, alas ! it is asked, where are we, at this day, to look for these qualities in those, whom we simple folks, who are not men of their world, must be labouring in vain to reclaim from it's impious and pernicious principles ? The task, though allowed all along to be most unpromising, is yet not desperate. How shall we inspire them with respect for the insulted, the incessantly attacked, yet eternally abiding Gospel ? Humility, the prime requisite for the reception of all christian graces, is in the eye of the modern Freethinker as derogatory from the dignity of his character, as in the ancient signification of the word, it was to the ambitious Roman*. That vain-

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glorious

* *Humilitas* (ab humo) meant all that was base, groveling, abject. To exorbitant Pride, *Superbia*, a detested vice even then, the opposite quality was not *Humilitas*. It was *Modestia*, (a modo) Moderation,

glorious presumption, so conspicuous in all the demeanour of our fashionable Freethinkers, is perhaps not more prevalent now among the higher ranks, though far more widely extended among the lowest, than it was a century ago. It is indeed an almost general complaint, that this age is declaredly at open war with all established opinions, be they ever so sacred. From the outrageous conflict a train of destructive consequences are apprehended, are by fore experience felt. Calamitous, no doubt, they are, they may continue to be, for an appointed season. Yet however frightful the appearance, it wore at the onset, or it exhibits in it's progress hitherto; the Christian, who derives his faith from divine, and not from human authority, will confidently predict the issue, remote or near, progressive or immediate. It certainly will not terminate in favour of those, who combat against Reason, heaven-taught

tion, Observance of decorum. More happily appropriate was the term in Greek, *Σωφροσύνη*, (*ex σως et φρήν*) Soundness of mind, or Sobriety of temper: For is not Pride a real Insanity?

Reason,

Reason, which is expressly warring against God, the Immutable Father of all lights, natural and revealed. Has it not, after all, been productive of one happy effect, a greater accuracy of disquisition? And has not this contributed much to introduce among the most intelligent and sincere believers, of every sect, a more decent reserve and caution in thinking and speaking of the Deity and his dispensations and decrees, in the great work of the redemption, with that modesty and reverence, that derogates no longer, so generally as formerly, from his adorable majesty? Are we not daily taught by the pious labours of these our respected brethren, which the insolence of infidelity has called forth, many admirable lessons*, conducive to illustrate the glory of the supremely wise Creator? Have they not advanced the rapturous discovery, in numberless instances, of his wise controul of second causes, in eliciting the most beneficent effects from apparent

* Shamefully slighted and discouraged indeed amidst the incogitancy of extreme, and too general dissipation.

evils, ignorantly deemed impossible to be accounted for, consistently with his universal and absolute goodness?

SECTION IV.

Divine Mercy in permission of it.

IF you are disposed, as upon due inquiry, and consultation with men of an enlarged mind, and unbiassed judgment, you cannot fail to be, to answer the Queries proposed at the close of the foregoing section, in the affirmative, be ready, at the same time, to account for the supposed increasing prevalence of all manner of wickedness and impiety. When a stronger and clearer light is daily cast upon the beneficent agency of a Divine Superintendant, in the wise direction of second causes and effects, and upon every other essential principle of true religion, whence comes it that men are said, with the more shameless and flagrant libertinism to lead the lives of infidels and atheists?

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“It were obstinate blindness and stupidity, we are told, to deny the present corruption, profligacy and dissolution of manners in the higher ranks, and from them spreading their contagion to the very lowest. What is obvious to common observation it were impertinent to disallow.” We grant it; only begging leave to question a little their alledged extent, or degree of prevalence. We know also where their worst extremes are most notorious. It is the fashionable tribe of deriders of all good principles, who claim the Arch-Fiend’s preeminence in evil, and whom we are most concerned to lead to serious reflection.

With this least corrigible race of mortals we have least to hope, and most to endure. Unhappily we can scarcely look abroad into the world, without remarking that the most odious vices often disgrace the characters of men of highly-polished understanding, and elegant external deportment. When disturbed at these truly shocking phenomena, too familiarly obtruded into public notice, what answer will you give to those, who
call

call upon you to vindicate the Divine Mercy in permitting them to exist? Admonish them to listen in silence to the awful voice of Heaven, bidding them check their fretfulness at the taunts of the ungodly, whose end it denounces by the mouth of David, in the 37th and 73d Psalms, two most admirable compositions, surpassing, in heart-felt truth, and sublime simplicity all the boasted strains of ancient Greek or Roman lyric poetry. They present in various lights, all flashing strong conviction to the soul, in which all sense of piety is not utterly extinct, the speedy confusion, the sudden dismay, discomfort and destruction of these detested bands of impious insulters of God and religion. To their galling outrages you are not exhorted to be insensible. No, God forbid. The Royal Prophet only enjoins you to refrain from a faithless lamentation for the painful, yet salutary shock you feel from reflecting on the divine sufferance of crimes, the penal and severe, yet merciful termination of which he sets before your eyes.

By the permission of Heaven, extreme
licentiousness

licentiousness is for a season allowed to have it's full scope. At such a season, all serious attention to moral truths, however clearly understood, and to all that endears them to the hearts of men, by the sanctions of religion, however forcibly expounded, of course grows obsolete and out of fashion. At such a season, what may we expect to see the conduct of that distinguished class of persons, whom Libertinism invests with the authority to fix the standard of popular taste, of prevailing sentiments and manners? Do we wonder, at such a season, not to see them exhibit that exemplary and honourable course of action, which anciently marked the character, and constituted the acknowledged dignity of the British Gentleman? The deference claimed, and blindly paid, at such a season, to the opinions and habits of certain wretchedly conspicuous parts of the community, however disgraceful to the rank they bear, diffuses the contagion far and wide. To flatter these, that ingenuity, those talents, which might have been effectually, gloriously exerted in stemming the torrent of licentiousness on one hand,
of

of corruption on the other, of a shameless prostitution of principle on both, are scandalously perverted to soothe the petulant humour of impiety in vogue. This open road to lucrative applause invites the vain, the venal man of genius without principle, suborns him unnaturally to decry, and turn into ridicule all that true Wisdom holds most sacred, and consequently all that Folly dreads as a stern and reproachful censor.

Thus it is that irreligious notions are avowed, proclaimed and countenanced, with unblushing audacity, by a certain number, (much less, I believe, than lying fame reports it,) of the notoriously dissolute among the most distinguished ranks, whose conduct would bring dishonour to the meanest. Infidelity thus, though admitted at first, not without an inbred horror, and deep-felt shudderings, by all, whose misfortune it is to be betrayed within the magic circle of their infernal influence, impels them precipitately into exorbitancies, from which they have by nature the utmost aversion. It even draws them insensibly into the most monstrous

stuous of all affectations, the boasting of vices of which they are actually exempt. This criminal complaisance rapidly spreads the fatal contagion, till it appears to a partial observer to pervade the whole mass of the community. Within the infected circles all nature assumes a new illusive aspect. To his charmed optics, the most conspicuous stations, are every where crowded with these, "*diræ facies, inimicaque vero agmina,*" these contemners of all religious and moral principles, these deriders of all things serious and sacred. To their imperious decrees he deems all opposition vain. By frequenting scenes, where this modish petulance reigns uncontrouled, he is persuaded to believe that sound reason and decency are every where put out of countenance, all exemplary piety exploded as rank hypocrisy, an uniform purity of manners as mere false pretence, nay the most disinterested beneficence as either ridiculous vanity, or a symptomatic token of idiocy.

An habitual converse with beings of this hardened stamp, or with men afflicted with a gloomy bigotry, or a distempered

pered spleen, will obliterate all idea of a most heart-cheering fact, of which, with an impartial inquiry, and happier dispositions, you may obtain satisfactory evidence: That even now there is actually existent, by the blessing of God, an incomparably superior number of men of a quite opposite character, imperfect indeed, and not altogether blameless, but of unassuming worth, integrity and truth, who disdain to court the public notice, or associate with that despicably splendid crew. Britons especially still there are, whom the favourable eye of Heaven will own possessed of all that manly steadiness of honest principles, that generous elevation of sentiment, that solidity and strength of judgment, for which the true-born English Gentleman once was justly celebrated, though now reproachfully declared, (but by what purblind estimators?) to have been long exterminated altogether from a degenerate nation. We have still, I trust, amongst us many a noble stout-hearted Varro, not quite discomfited, but scorning yet to despair of it's future glory.

Mark

Mark here, that it is only the exorbitance of these reproaches that is now censured. We are far from disallowing that (though improved, in many respects, as well in a moral and religious, as an intellectual light,) the character of Englishmen appears not at this day, to shine forth with that encreased and purer lustre, which their advancement in every branch of useful science, and their mighty boast of great, though listless, because discountenanced talents, might lead us to expect. Certain it is, that what is now fillily called *life* in the fashionable world, has contributed much to render it contemptible, and what we as foolishly call conversation there, which is commonly below contempt, is often affrontive, in the highest degree, to the chaste ears and pious heart of every true Christian. Is not "*the hand of the enemy, who hath done this, visible in the tares which have sprung up with the fruit of the good seed, sown in the field of the celestial husbandman?*"

But are there not some amongst ourselves, my young friends, unwittingly instrumental

strumental in forwarding the darkest stratagems of our wily foe? Have we not many dissolute, or weak and misjudging brethren, who have caught the epidemical infection? Thus become accomplices in the mischief, have they not choaked the pure seeds of religion yet more than the thorns of persecution, the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and worldly lusts? Have not the vicious conduct, and unchristian temper of too many of it's professors contributed to make rank the soil, in which have sprung up the pernicious weeds of Scepticism, Infidelity, Deism, Atheism; where the germination of all manner of wickedness and depravity continues still to shoot forth so luxuriantly?

Though these last Queries may not, as we could wish, admit of a reply, by a direct negative; though the foregoing hints may have indicated some other concurrent sources of the present apparent increase of infidelity; it may yet be asked: Is there not some *one* general cause, regular in it's operation, to which may be principally

cipally ascribed this perplexing phenomenon; that an age accounted to possess a great pre-eminence in every branch of knowledge curious or useful, above all that have gone before it, should in a like proportion be distinguished by a greater defection from the principles of sound morality and true religion? One fact there is, that perhaps may throw some light upon this question. It is confirmed by the general history of all civilized nations, that in all advances to complete refinement in art and science, an equal progression is observable in all the extremes of vicious luxury. The sagest moralists have painted in the strongest colours the train of evils, which we see exhibited in it's present excess. It enflames the passions with fresh, and ever-varied incentives to vice. It dazzles and distracts the mind in a foolish round of vice and dissipation.

Happily in times like these the eye of the All-wise Ruler of the universe is not closed. Always ready to promote the eternal interests of his subjects in this state of discipline, his merciful and seasonable cor-

correction will set all right. Turn again with a steady attention, to the quick-shifting scenes, yet regular recurrence of similar effects from resembling secondary causes, in every page of the recorded history of mankind. Behold the same all-controlling Power preparing, and dispensing at proper intervals, to these obstinately inconsiderate mortals, a terrible though salutary lesson. Parental and benign to the whole human race of intelligent beings have been the signal strokes of his chastising scourge; sometimes on the whole aggregate body of a proud and boastful, but sinful and devoted state at once. On Babylon, on Jerusalem, on Rome of old it fell, with long-provoked severity. How dreadfully is it sounding at this moment over the affrighted guilty nations of Europe! Kind heaven avert it's fall from this our awfully threatened, but, I hope, timely repentant country.

The wretched individuals too, the gay sons of extravagance and riot, who in times of general corruption and degeneracy, are licensed uncontrolled to make the most conspicuous figure on the theatre

atre of the world, who ambitious of the applause of fools, are obtruding their disgraceful enormities continually upon the public eye, and rendering talents, affluence, and elevated rank the panders merely to their pernicious vices; even these are ordained to become useful instruments of discipline in the hand of God. Thus through his merciful Providence shall "*the * wicked be made a ransom for the righteous.*" They shall spread for a short season the infection of their bad examples. But they shall exhibit also in a striking light, an awful and lasting document, in the fatal consequences they draw down upon their own heads by their exorbitant courses.

Thus their offences against their own souls, against conscience and reason, against the authority and majesty of God, are, no doubt, permitted by the inscrutable counsel of the wise Ruler of all intelligent beings, for some good moral purpose. These scenes and characters, creative at first sight of disgust and abhorrence, are presented by our Divine Instructor to his rational pupils, in this transitory pe-

* Prov. xxi. 18.

riod of their state of discipline, that by exciting in their breasts a salutary indignation, they may advance the piety of the heirs of everlasting life to greater purity and perfection. Indulge an old man, in pursuing to a bolder extent, and applying to the present disorderly state of things, in this region of perpetual vicissitude, the trite allusion to the intrigue of a scenical representation, the unravelling of which he may not live to see. Yet he gladly entertains a firm presentiment that the solution of the perplexed and turbulent portion of the piece, now acting before our eyes, with all our late and present troubles, will be found conducive to what the judicious Aristotle points out as the grand requisite in every perfect serious drama, by raising a due terror and compassion, to refine and purify the human heart and mind. If you are determined to cherish a like soothing hope; and with an unbiaſſed judgment (for without it you will never obtain ideas sufficiently clear for the contemplation,) to correct your idle complaints of the prevalent extremes of profligacy and impiety, you may re-eſtabliſh your ſouls in
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that happy state of calm resignation to the Supreme Disposer, which marks the character of a sound Christian.

It may still be objected, that it is but a dubious gloom, ill counterfeiting light, that is here thrown upon the supposed frightful preponderance of moral evil in works of a good Deity. Need I repeat once more that this shockingly profane supposition of preponderant evil has been proved to be as contradictory to truth, as it is injurious both to God and man? It will always nevertheless be regretted that, (even granting the alledged proportion of evil is grossly exaggerated by the splenetic moralist,) the existence of a triumphant villain should be permitted in a single instance to aggravate the woes of an afflicted just man, should so far at least render abortive all our pious labours to vindicate the ways of God to man. You will readily answer: that it may reasonably be presumed this mysterious dispensation of inferior irregularity can only take place as a means of promoting some beneficent purpose of a superior order,

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either

either in this or a future stage of our existence.

A complete idea of this divine purpose is required. Bid the objector wait the grand instructor, Death. Unrevealed of course till then it will in part remain. This perplexing speculation has often exercised the strongest powers of the human mind. It has not been altogether in vain. Very seldom, in truth, has it attracted a due attention from any but such as possess a more than ordinary strength. The unreflecting vulgar escapes from it altogether. The weak and humble reasoner views it with anxious concern, still shrinking painfully from it, as bordering upon profanation. The pious inquirer after sacred truth, sensible how inadequate are the abilities of so imperfect a creature as man to fathom the depth of his Creator's wisdom, yet lives in hopes that he shall one day be advanced to the enjoyment of that blessing in a higher degree. Being conscious, in the mean time, that the Deity has equally decreed his incapacity to be admitted here into a knowledge of the secrets of his Providence, as into the
 mysteries

mysteries of his essence, he seeks in both only to discover fresh motives for resignation and gratitude to God, and good-will to all his fellow creatures.

But the modern false *Philosophist*, * whom the courtesy of our nation foolishly styles *Free-thinker*, and that of our conceited neighbours, more absurdly still, *Esprit-fort*, at one slight bound high overleaps the impenetrable barrier; and looking defiance on the face of heaven, arraigns from this dim spot the adorable perfections of a Divine Superintendant of the universe. Having here again presented to your view an Adversary, whom Truth, with the heaven-tempered spear of the faithful Seraph has compelled to start up in his own proper form, you will now, with the mild rebuke of an humble disciple of Christ, yet confidently, and without reserve, maintain what the inspired Apostle impowers you to declare, that ungodly habits and inordinate affections are indeed by God permitted to

* Will this new-coined word be permitted to pass current?

become to him the fatal sources of his rejection of the glad tidings of the gospel, as well as of the exemplary punishment, that awaits them. Christ came to vindicate the glory of God in this mysterious permission. He came to "*give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of sins.*" * But of these it is the boast of the Libertine, that as he has no design to relinquish them, he needs no remission. He renounces "*the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*" †

In assigning these prevailing and confirmed habits of depravity as the most immediate causes of that irreligion, which is imagined to be now gaining ground, you implicitly maintain that it is against these immoralities, that every true believer, who is zealous to establish our holy faith, is bound to direct his principal and constant opposition. To this mode

* Luke i. 77.

† Ib. 78, 79.

of preaching the gospel he is exhorted, and forcibly engaged by the precepts and example of it's first propagators, and our divine Lawgiver himself. Persevere thus in shewing that the whole doctrine of christianity approves itself to the heart and understanding of every good man, as a doctrine perfective of every virtue, as well as of true piety. Leave therefore the contentious topics, (in no wise conducive to it's prime purposes,) to the graceless polemics, who execrate all moral preaching, as insisting chiefly on what they are pleased to depreciate, as least important in the faith of Christ. Behold his immediate followers, treading in their Master's steps, throughout the whole of their ministry, and perpetually pointing out the necessary connection between a profligate life, and hatred of that truth, which displays it's deformity and fatal consequences in a most alarming point of view, not only as an utter disqualification for the glory and perfection of our nature, to which they were sent to raise our hopes; but as a mark of reprobation, or a certain doom, at the day of retribution, to misery irretrievable, or, (as all texts, describing

scribing it, may be rightly understood,) of which the sinner himself must despair to see an end.

It is no wonder that they, who boast their privilege of governing themselves by the instinctive call of sensual appetite alone, should spurn at the pure dictates of reason, enlightened by heavenly wisdom; that they who glory in their shame, should have no regard for what concerns the true dignity of their nature; that they who are fondly attached to what degrades them below the condition of a brute, should outwardly contemn, and inwardly abhor the idea of that perfection of a spiritual and holy life, that is adapted to exalt them above the condition of humanity. When they vent their spleen at the christian precept of self-denial, so reasonable in the apprehension of the humble and sincere believer, and so suitably enjoined to the arrogant libertine, this insolence, you see, is quite in character in men of their vicious and selfish cast.

Note well the distinctive mark of the
most

most pestilent foes of the genuine spirit of the gospel. Their enmity is fiercest against what approves itself to every sound mind as salutary, just and sacred. It is far more complaisant to the grossest absurdities of bigotry and superstition. These they find it sometimes convenient, and in general easy to accord most amicably with a life of open and abandoned profligacy. But against plain practical religious truth, they discharge their spite, with the utmost bitterness and virulence. It is no uncommon thing, in times especially when the most extravagant dissolution of manners prevails, to see libertinism and enthusiasm unnaturally blended together in the same character, and rising to a more confident and louder tone, in proportion as they depart farther and farther from consistency and common sense. Have we not frequent instances at this day, of these double-dealers, prophanely ranting in a religious garb, enlisted under the banners of Methodism, whilst they trample down equally both the law and the gospel? Against all moral obligation, all rational principle of thought and action they impudently declaim, as ex-
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cluded by the paramount privileges of implicit faith, on the one hand, and on the other, as encroaching intolerably upon the rights of a bold free thinker.

Let it here be especially noticed to the honour of the clergy of the church of England, that the most virulent invectives against them are daily vented by men of this description adversaries alike to morality and sound reasoning. We may, I believe, without great presumption, maintain that there exists not, perhaps never before has there existed a religious community, of which so distinguished a portion, conscious of what constitutes the chief glory of the most perfect human establishment, are so willing to submit all their religious notions, to the strictest rational discussion. Persuaded of their perfect agreement with the true spirit of that most awfully respected divine revelation, from whence they are faithfully derived, they are blessed with a firm reliance that their exactest scrutiny will perpetuate their established truth. This revelation they cherish as the most inestimable gift of heaven, enlightening their
minds

minds with the sublimest, yet at the same time the simplest ideas of the Deity, and of his relation to his intelligent creature man, for whose moral perfection it was graciously imparted. It's true sense, they trust, he has ordained expressly that our best reason should explore and interpret, unrestrained by any human authority; thus submitting alone, with an entire and undivided devotion, to the word of the adored Giver himself. Is it not manifestly upon account of this ingenuous candour and sincerity of disposition in the most esteemed and eminently distinguished members of our Church, that they have brought upon themselves the furious obloquy of these *profaners* of religion, a title, which they, by notorious abuse, most liberally bestow upon the friends of uniform virtue and consistent piety.

The cursory glance, here hazarded at an astonishing moral phenomenon, may appear, upon a nearer view, to require some further elucidation, especially as the present state of religion in this kingdom renders it a most interesting object of
your

your attention. This task earnestly recommended to your Addresser by a much respected friend,* (who far better qualified himself, chuses to shun the unpleasant controversy,) he means not to decline altogether; previously requesting that whatever he may advance concerning a very promiscuous body of Christians, many of whom he believes entitled to real esteem, may not be particularly applied, but where it is notoriously due.—To all abstract speculation upon the nature of man, a coalition so contradictory to itself as Libertinism with Religious Enthusiasm would seem impossible to exist in real life. You will however see it confirmed, in frequent instances, by daily observation. The report is credibly attested that it is of late grown familiar among the deluded followers of the ranting preachers above described, who so bitterly arraign their meeker brethren, as apostates from the christian faith, merely for their conceiving it to be connected with morality and right reason.

* See Preface, near the conclusion.

Is not this extreme over-growth of absurdity, it may be asked, incompatible with the concession for which we have been lately contending? The solid advantages resulting, from an awakened spirit of inquiry, to the improvement of our understanding are, it seems, not so far extended, as we could wish. Consider the persons, upon whose intellects imposture and self deceit, with their blended contrarieties, have such power in impelling them to deface or deride the spotless beauty of the true religion. That this increase of folly and perverseness should occasionally be gaining ground among them, that it has so, more especially of late; these are points, of which some too credible accounts of causes, unpleasantly productive of consequent effects, have been suggested, which cannot well be supposed to have escaped your serious reflection.

In the mean time, you will certainly not expect the most favourable opportunities of advancement in spiritual or moral endowments, will be readily embraced, or exhibited in the double cast of characters under consideration. They
are

are not likely at all to engage the attention, much less to influence the conduct of an unprincipled multitude, that renounces all concern for the interests of truth and virtue. To many, capacity of mind, to very many more, ingenuity of heart is wanting, to qualify them to receive the benefit of improved reason *. It is requisite, it seems, that the mind of man should (*προδιδεργασθαι τοις ἰδεσι*) be predisposed to virtuous habits, by due culture and discipline, if not by nature, before it can be taught to respect the laws of moral obligation, or the precepts of religion, natural or revealed. The Libertine combats the authority of both, by disclaiming all natural sense of right and wrong, and disputing the reality of any revelation of the will of God. The hypocritical Enthusiast seeks to shroud his disregard of moral truth, at one time under a peculiar display of sanctity in the eye of the public, at another under an exclusive claim

* Ὁ δὲ λόγος καὶ ἡ διδασχὴ μὴ πότε ἔκ ἐν ἅπασιν ἰσχυρὰ
ἀλλὰ ὅτε προδιδεργασθαι τοις ἰδεσι τὴν τῆ ἀμφοτέρῃ ψυχὴν
πρὸς τὸ καλῶς χεῖρειν καὶ μισεῖν ὥσπερ γῆν τὴν θρεψάντα τὸ
σπέρμα.

ARIST. Lib. X. Cap. 9.

of extraordinary attention to be paid to his arbitrary expositions of a divine revelation. This claim is the more exorbitant, as the supposed articles of faith, which he pretends to derive immediately from the word of God, as worthy alone to be urged to our belief; being that sole pledge of our redemption, that superseded all regard for those sacred laws of God, which are levelled to the capacities, and endeared to the affections of all good men, and of universal influence in rendering them happier and better. These righteous laws he decries as utterly unimportant, except so far only as they are connected with certain incomprehensible notions, with which the expounder himself is the first to declare that reason has nothing to do. Their purposely involved no-meaning, he knows we must in vain attempt to unfold, and is manifestly not at all solicitous to know what his hearers are left to think of that *Revelation*, which, being unintelligible, is avowedly *unrevealed*. It is easy enough to expose his contradiction with himself, and from thence to account for his reconciliation in practice, and secretly, though perhaps unwittingly,

unwittingly, in principle, with the libertine, professedly of an opposite character.

Here then, after all, we must look for their precise point of coincidence. Both are alike inclined to walk after their own ungodly lusts. Both are alike determined not to conform to the laws of God, ordained for their control. The Hypocrite wilfully misrepresents the purport of these laws. But the professed Infidel denies not their authority only, but the very existence of their supposed Enactor. While the fanatic depreciates the dignity of human nature, and vilifies reason and virtue, in order to exalt his pre-eminent glory, in renouncing them, for the possession, by inspiration of the supernatural gifts of Heaven; the derider of a divine revelation affects to magnify his nature, his reason, while he degrades the one into a mere pander, the other into a specious advocate for his vices. While the lawless Libertine defies the threatened displeasure of a tremendous Judge of earth and heaven against the transgressors of his sacred ordinances; the self-deluded mystic main-
tains

tains their whole essence to consist in captivating his reason to some incomprehensible system of belief, or quaint mode of speech, operating as a charm, to produce a miraculous dispensation from all regard to their moral tendency.

SECTION V.

Most fatal Extreme.

HAVING considered the prime cause of this profane mockery, and notwithstanding it's present alarming height, attempted to throw some light upon the divine mercy, in the permission of it, as the Scripture, in the example of the holy Psalmist has encouraged us, let us pursue the progress of it to it's most fatal extreme. You have seen the frantic Libertine abandoned to the dominion of his ungodly lusts, and prompted by them to this unbounded licence in thinking and speaking with contempt of what all wise and good men have ever held most sacred.

sacred. View him hardened now to such a pitch, as to determine to live utterly independent upon all restraint, by the dread of an invisible Sovereign of the universe. He proclaims aloud the desperate resolution to which his soul, appalled in secret, gives the lie, to extinguish at once all idea of the existence of any such being. Could he overturn that fundamental principle of all religion, which the very fiends themselves are compelled to believe, with trembling, he might entertain some faint hope of palliating his utter want of moral principle in his practice, to silence for ever those dire forebodings, which, at every lucid interval, his conscience is appointed to awaken in his tortured breast.

But finding, as we have seen, the existence of an Almighty Power invincibly maintaining it's hold upon his mind, when he is able really to think at all, and the proofs of it so strong as not to be suppressed, or resisted without certain defeat; he assumes fresh confidence for another effort. He asserts, what by the utmost agonizing stretch of thought, he despairs of a possibility of rendering probable,

bable, or even conceivable, that there is no divine Providence, no superintending and all-discerning Mind, that takes cognizance, or judicial notice of the affairs of men. This assertion again is but an outward strife against conviction. “* *Having not the law, he is a law unto himself.*” He feels, he owns his strife is vain against it. His passionate utterance indicates how small a part his reason takes in all he speaks. His very mockery and affected gaiety, his strongest fence, in company, against all sober argument, deserts him in private, and leaves to the mercy of Conscience his conviction of a dreaded truth, the reality of an avenging Providence. That invisible delegate within of a Divine Legislator fails not there to present a future judgment to his fears, and anticipates his condemnation.

Yet still enslaved, by inveterate habit, to his ungodly passion, incorrigibly bent to make his disorderly appetite the sole arbiter of his conduct, he feels his distemper advancing rapidly, with dire internal

* Rom. ii. 14.

struggles, to it's last extremity. No longer now will he admit the existence of an eternal law of righteousness. Virtue and vice with him are mere empty names. The distinction of moral good and evil has no foundation in nature.—You shudder, and well you may, at these symptoms of so horrible a derangement of the human intellect. Too true it is, these monstrous absurdities he dares to utter without a blush. You have here before you a truly deplorable instance of a most pernicious habit, very prevalent among men of weak judgment and strong conceit. It is most common among disputants of this description against religion. It is a strict observation, that in all contests the most arrogant and passionate declaimer is generally the most abhorrent from common sense. As in confounding good and evil he will entirely renounce it, you will have a hopeful task indeed seriously to confute what no man of a sound understanding could possibly have conceived. It is plain he is not in his right senses, nor understands himself at all, who maintains that things so essentially distinct in nature, as health and sickness, vice and virtue,

true, happiness and misery, are precisely the same, or have only a notional, but no positive or actual difference. As well might he say, that it is from opinion only that bread has a nutritive, or arsenic a deleterious quality: If utter ignorance, a disordered fancy, a perverse ingenuity mistakes or confounds opposite ideas, or effects, all you can do for the man will be to set these opposite ideas and effects distinctly and clearly before his sight. If still he persists in contradicting self-evident truth, you know what to think of his sanity of mind.

But such, he declares, are his real sentiments. You may confidently repeat, that he believes them not himself: for belief or sentiments, without ideas, are mere words without meaning. But do not his actions, more openly than words, does not the whole tenor of his life evince that he sees no difference at all between good and evil? Of the obvious tendency of either, it is plain, he is determined to take no account. Let woful experience, let personal feeling arouse him once to a power of reflection upon his own thoughts:

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you will hear the same person complain aloud of injuries vast and manifold, which he dreads or has incurred from various quarters, the infidelity of a wife, the undutifulness of children, the ingratitude and treachery of false friends, the dishonesty of servants, the direct invasion of his life or property, by the hand of the assassin, robber, or incendiary. Then is your time to make him sensible that having set the example of contempt for all principle, moral and religious, he is himself an accomplice in those very crimes, of which, by the wholesome decree of that Providence, by him so grossly insulted, he is doomed to rue the consequences. Bid him tell you whether, when he openly flights the sanction of all laws, divine and human, he really means to excite a witness, a jury, a judge to spurn the sacred obligation of an oath, of truth, of justice; to encourage a sharpening gamester to trick him out of his estate, or it's legal heir to make a forcible entry upon it by a secret stab; to urge a pestilent rebel to embroil or overturn a peaceable and well-constituted government, to gratify the malice of defeated ambi-

tion, an intriguing statesman to undermine, by treachery and calumny, a competitor of approved merit, or to debase by corruption and cabal, every virtuous principle in a nation, a remorseless tyrant to glut his pride or mad resentment in the blood of guiltless millions, provoked into war by his unjust aggressions.

Will the natural tendency of his profane tenets, thus exhibited, in such horrid instances, as subversive of all moral obligation, strike, without effect, upon his callous heart? When their obvious consequences, ruinous to his country, mischievous to mankind, are brought home to his feelings, as pernicious also to what alone he holds most dear, himself, will he persist in maintaining them still? You are, in that case, released from all further engagement to contend with an adversary too insensate or too dull to admit of confutation, or salutary check. It were a desperate attempt indeed to apply the method of calm expostulation, hitherto recommended, to a wretch, in whom both reason and conscience appear to be totally

tally extinct. In silence cast one last look upon this his extreme pitch of insanity. The weapons of insult and mockery alone are left him. With these he deals his random strokes, with equal blindness, at natural and revealed religion; betraying the more senseless rage, the more their rebound upon his own head makes him feel their impotence and futility, grown contemptible even to himself.

CHAPTER VI.

Variations in the last Stage.

SECTION I.

Apparently commencing Penitence.

LET us not hastily pronounce the dis-tempered mind of this wretched mad-man utterly incurable. It may probably resist the utmost effort of human skill. But the mercy of God has abler instructors than man to send him. The scenes of sin and misery, which you may have exhibited exactly from the life, he regards as the mere phantoms of melancholy, of no reality or concern to him, while the objects are at a distance. Let but the pangs of a sore, yet lingering disease be inflicted.

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on him, let home-felt calamity, let ruin, let the agonies of death be avowedly brought upon him by the crimes, concurrent with his own, of the proselytes he has made to his creed of Infidelity. These may stimulate his lethargic sense, and quicken it to a late conviction, that whatever sallies of an acute and brilliant wit he may before have boasted, whatever talents he may have displayed in confounding truth, and putting decency, virtue and religion out of countenance, his head and heart have been long un-found.

When thus restored in some degree to the state of an intelligent and conscious being, he is prepared to form a right judgment of his past errors, to discern the present necessity of his amendment and newness of life, his bending with humble resignation beneath the correcting hand, and imploring the forgiveness of the offended Arbiter of his future destiny. To direct you now in the pious work of administering consolation to a soul thus mercifully struck with a sore affliction, you are requested to turn your attention

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to *Bishop Burnet's* interesting narrative of *some passages in the life and death of John Earl of Rochester*. You will there behold an admirable example, set before you in a strong light, of what has been actually effected in such a case. It exhibits a short, but full and distinct view of the method practised by an eminent Divine, in just estimation for his honest ingenuity and frankness in exposing the errors and depravities of the human heart: though while his own was perfectly upright and pure, some doubt has been made of his equal sagacity in discovering the strange duplicities in those of other men, of whom he was sometimes, but very seldom, the dupe. But the circumstance of his conduct, most recommended to your esteem and imitation, was his exemplary and rigorous discharge of all the most important duties of his function. The precious legacy*, delivered at the conclusion

* It was introduced to the early regard, and has ever since been endeared to the affectionate esteem of one, whose ancestors bore affinity, by several intermarriages with those of that eminent Writer. That incident it probably was, that suggested the first idea
of

sion of his History of his own times, and nearly at the close of his life, applied to all ranks, and highly interesting to all, claims the peculiar attention of those of his own profession. Happy will it be, for you, if it shall excite you to be emulous of some conformity to so excellent a model.

Applying it to the present occasion, you will heartily approve, with benefit to yourselves, and comfort to a penitent sinner, the encouragement and assistance the good Bishop afforded to a mind emerging, by the grace of God, from an abyss of darkness, seldom if ever before, cheered with any glimpse of steady light. You will then earnestly watch the blessed opportunity to fix the attention of the repentant Libertine upon this unchangeable decree of Nature and Providence, that woful consequences should necessarily attend every departure from the principles of true religion. By this one of this parting friendly advice to his *younger* Brethren for the presumption of which in one so little known, the unambitious integrity alone of his motive can plead some apology.

last

last effort you may possibly succeed in making him sensible that it was by the subjection of his heart to ungodly lusts, that he was led to infidelity : that it was his renouncing all faith in God, that confirmed him in his evil practices, and became the source of all his misery, his final deliverance from which can only be effected by his mastery over his exorbitant passions, and return into the track prescribed by an Almighty Lawgiver.

SECTION II.

Wavering.

IF you have the happiness to find, as in the case of Burnet's noble penitent, this home-felt application of saving truths has taken present hold on his mind, recollect the probable chance there may be that your wavering profelyte, still a slave to evil propensities, which he is unwilling utterly to renounce, will quickly start aside from this momentary conviction, or transient fit of remorse. To escape from
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the resistless force of your main arguments, which had just before constrained his reluctant assent, he will have recourse to his usual stratagem, by directing his cross purposes to what bears no relation to it. He will renew his attacks, with fresh pertinacity, under cover of certain inexplicable difficulties in the old or new Testament. It is confessed that some questions about obscure passages, though agitated, over and over again, by commentators of profound learning, accuracy, and judgment, are not ultimately decided yet. And what then? Perhaps their best exertions may never put an end to the controversy in such manner as to preclude all possible variety of opinion about them. So far, in truth, as they do not affect the grand purport of the revelation, they cannot shake the divine indestructible basis of it's credit. Their effects become important, when the malignant pride of the disputants about them render them an occasion of counteracting the main intent of the gracious Founder of our holy religion.

Most

Most irksome, doubtless, will be your task, in repelling the newly vamped, though long antiquated cavils of an untameable adversary, who will persist in combating for the reign of darkness, in opposition to the light. Ever recurring, thick as gnats, again and again, to the charge, they may perpetuate an aggravated trial of your patience, though repeatedly beaten off by the same well known and approved confutations. Yet urge them still, my good young brethren, with the meekness of the wise Apostle to the Gentiles, no less than to the Hebrews:—“* *Having compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that ye yourselves also are compassed with infirmity.*” Still condescend to watch the sudden starts and wanderings of your strayed and headstrong charge. Gently reclaim and support his stumbling steps, till you have extricated him from his thorny maze of captious objections.

Your apposite and judicious answers, relative to points susceptible of the high-

* Hebrews v. 2.

est moral evidence imaginable, though naturally not admitting absolute or mathematical demonstration, may possibly again be rejected, with redoubled aversion. He may be still inflated with pride unsubdued, and glorying in a capacity for resistance, for which the most stupid obstinacy is the only requisite qualification, he may be prompted even to renew his former baffled onset against the first principles of natural religion. A striking confession of the memorable Repentant Rake, lately under consideration, is recorded in the Sermon preached at his funeral by Mr. *R. Parsons*.—"One day, he said, at an atheistical meeting, I undertook to manage the cause, as the principal disputant against God and piety; and for my performance received the applause of the whole company: Upon this, my mind was terribly struck, and I immediately replied thus to myself—Good God! that a man that walks upright, that sees the wonderful works of God, and has the uses of his senses and reason should use them to the defying of his Creator! But though this was a good beginning towards conversion, yet
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it went off again, and I was never well reconciled to the business of Christianity."

The strange extravagancies commonly related of his past life clearly evince what it was, that prevented, at the time, the natural effects of this strong compunction. His understanding and fancy, though endowed by his Maker with uncommon vigour, had been habitually under the control of some criminal passion, kept in continual ferment, by the example of his profligate associates. The native candour and ingenuity of his temper, so well exhibited in the interesting narratives, referred to, of the closing scenes of his wretchedly checquered life, the decorum, with which he received the exhortation of his two reverend monitors, were such as you are not to look for in a conference with an infidel of the present date. To his heightened insolence, and ungoverned licence at this period, is superadded a circumstance, not general, as foolishly reported, but confined, I believe, to that pitiful tribe, a growing contempt for the clergy.

This

This unlucky propensity, so prevalent in a modern man of fashion, your complete confutation of his principles may probably exasperate. Be still mindful to oppose to it the sober advice of Solomon :—" *A soft answer turneth it away.*"* To his irritated pride, your pious compassion, appearing to him but a decent veil, to cover your indignant scorn of a defeated sophist, may prove an occasion of his flying out afresh into passionate invectives against the whole body of the priesthood. Against this familiarly recurring symptom of the deeply rooted malignity of his distemper, be it our next care to provide, and keep always ready at hand the most efficacious remedy.

SECTION III.

Symptom of fatal Relapse.

PREPARED for what you have to expect from your revolted profelyte, especially if, like the Prelate's, he be a man

* Prov. xv. 1.

of observation and knowledge of the world, you must be ready to refute the ordinary plea for his failure of respect for that religion, which you so warmly recommend. He now insists upon the open infidelity of the preachers of it themselves, manifested in the notorious contrast of the lives they lead with the doctrines they deliver from the pulpit. If curiosity, or ill-will to the church has led him to bestow some partial reflection upon ecclesiastical history, and polemical theology, he insults you with a scandalous proof of their insincerity, their pertinacious fixing the fundamental principles of religion in notional systems, in which they are compelled to own themselves altogether in the dark, whilst they impudently claim for mere formal rites, or an implicit submission to their notions and discipline, a plenary indemnity for the breach of all moral obligation.

With regard to the odious caricatures he is wont to draw of the conduct, public and private, of the English clergy of the present day, it will avail you little to oppose to this returning torrent of scanda-

lous reproaches, your modest persuasion—that they proceed from his inveterate antipathy, that they spring from the collision of a contrariety of character, and are the mere effusions of prejudice.—An impetuous burst of mockery will here break forth against your gentle palliatives.—“Precious apologists truly! when their shameless vying with the loosest and most profligate of us Laity, in every mode of dissipation and licentiousness, is so notorious. No cognizance are you pleased to take of their rank hypocrisy in public, to cover atrocious vice in private, their insufferable airs of haughtiness, ever blended with mean servility, the disgrace their venal prostitution brings on their *sacred function* in this free nation, by becoming the dirtiest tools in the hands of the vilest slave of a Tory administration.”—

To this foul insult your proper reply, and best mode of vindicating the injured character of your brethren will be, by lamenting his misfortune, or the wilful error of his choice, in knowing only some of the worst and most contemptible individuals

viduals of an order of men highly respectable as beneficial to the public, as appointed to the glorious employment of "*workers together with God, beseeching men not to receive the grace of God in vain* *;" as ordained to maintain a salutary influence over the minds of men, in establishing the welfare and good order of society, by the force of divine truth, and a declaration of the eternal law of righteousness. You will confidently assure him that, in the opinion of all partial judges, no class of men exhibits a greater, or even a proportionate number of justly respected characters; or so blameless, upon the whole, though not immaculate, as the clerical.

You may add to this, that though a portion of disgrace is reflected upon all professions, from the enormities of certain followers of the same vocation; nevertheless the signal advantages mankind derives from the experience, wisdom or probity of many excellent men, who adorn the venerable faculties of law and

* 2 Cor. vi. 1.

physic, ensure the solid esteem of all men of sense, whilst the silly, ignorant and indiscriminate railer alone abuses all the professors of either, as a pack of fraudulent quacks or pettifoggers. The security and glory resulting to the public from the services of the army and navy, notwithstanding the infamy attendant on the cowardice or villainy of a few individual retainers of both, never fail to procure due praise to those who behave themselves properly in their several stations, and to those who display a distinguished conduct, fortitude and magnanimity, an exalted degree of respect. If you shall claim a similar degree of candid treatment for the clerical function, dignified, as envy and malice dare not disallow, by many worthies, who have conferred the greatest blessings, and done the highest honour to human nature, by whom will your claim be contested? By those, who whatever be their rank or titles, should in point of manners or judgment, be commonly regarded as the refuse and dregs of the community.—

“ But

“ But where, he will exclaim, in the name of goodness, are these said worthies fled, and how little does the present race of their successors tread in their steps ?”

—You may, I trust, without a blush, affirm : that compared in respect to decent morals, to the honourable employment of their talents, for the advantage spiritual and temporal of those committed to their care, to the real utility and public benefit to mankind, they may be fairly said, if considered in a comprehensive view, to excel their predecessors in times, which the spleen alone of your detractors inclines them to prefer to the present : at the *joyous* era, for instance, of the restoration of royalty ; at the *glorious* recovery of our rights and liberties, by a timely Revolution, at the *honest* days of triumphant toryism, that just preceded the * *happy* settlement of our constitution, at the accession of the royal family now upon the throne, whom God long preserve, to “ establish peace and happiness, truth

* The epithets appropriated to those several eras, familiar once in the fluctuations of party, though less in use, at present, are not yet quite obsolete.

and

and justice, religion and piety among us for all generations."

This resolute assertion of the due share of praise here attributed to the existent body of the established Clergy, you will, it is hoped, be able to support, upon sure and positive grounds, if like your galled and relapsing penitent, you have critically noted, and duly reflected upon what you have been led to observe of mankind, but not like him, of the most worthless and corrupt part of it only, whom he has been pleased to honour with his acquaintance, through a simularity of irregular habits, in a course of fashionable dissipation. Of these, his amphibious associates, the sagest and most virtuous amongst you will probably have as little ability to speak from experience, as he can have of the truly respectable part, whose acknowledged merits, and real dignity in humble stations, though they have seldom chanced, and never sought to fall in his way, you may be confident in maintaining. You may allow that among those whom he has chosen to distinguish by his countenance and commerce, may possibly be

be found those characters disgraced by the stigmas, affixed, by men of bad heads and worse hearts, to the whole body of the clergy—" *the grossness of ignorance in believing an imposture, or the more degrading and flagitious infamy of supporting what they do not believe **."—In whatever shape they are seen, clerical or lay, or the aforesaid compound of both, of such miscreants there cannot be two opinions.

Upon their prevalence, at the present era, beyond the past, who shall pronounce with certainty but the Almighty Searcher of hearts? As far however as, (in the private recollection of above threescore years, your Addresser can trace back, or) the most accurate and extensive information of printed memorials can throw some light, the general conduct of your order displayed in all it's varied aspects, with or without the requisite allowances of candour, of which the temper of the times is remarkably niggard, reflects a claim to greater honour and credit in the

* See an excellent charge of the Bishop of Llandaff.

Printed for Evans, 1795.

rising generations upon the whole, than that of any preceding period.—“ * Nay, do not think he flatters you : for what advancement can he seek from you, who have no revenue but your good spirits ?” As a sure token he does not mean it, he will venture just to hint a circumstance, (shrewdly assigned by one who has plainly shewn, he means to shew us no right good-will, or serious reverence) as the prime efficient cause of our acknowledged greater regularity of conduct, that “ the eyes of the laity are now opened upon it, with a severer scrutiny than heretofore.” Accept with thankfulness this favourable concession from such a quarter, let the inducement be what it will. Invite him, in return, to persevere in that strictness of inquisition, from which, so far from shrinking, you receive with pleasure the advantage of a kind caution to be ever on your guard, and cheerfully prepared to face it.

You may at the same time ingenuously declare, that in your present vindication of the character of the church and church-

* Hamlet to Horatio.

men from his unmerited reproaches, you have his real benefit chiefly in view: you are seeking the redress of an injury he is doing to himself more than to them: you are desirous of mitigating the fury of his fatally renewed antipathy to a profession ordained to administer a remedy to his distemper. A portion of blame it has deservedly incurred, upon which his ill-directed censure never once has glanced. This it shall never be your wish to palliate, being ready to confess that on various accounts it falls with manifest propriety on too many members of a church, most truly venerable in itself, and in general, admirably adapted to keep alive our sense of duty to God and man. Never will you (notwithstanding your profound respect for its constitution and ordinances, upon the whole,) maintain, in conformity to the sage *ipse dixit* of Dr. Swadlin *, that "every tittle of our forms was the immediate dictate of divine inspiration." You will, on the other hand, readily allow, that it would

* A *pro* neglected author, properly so styled by Bishop Hoadly. See Reasonableness of Conformity. P. 230.

be vain to seek in an undisturbed ecclesiastical establishment, (which has not been brought to submit to a revival, for two centuries and a half,) for examples of that heroic fortitude, that generous ardour in the cause of injured truth, that signal piety and purity of manners, which in times remote, far more auspicious than the present to the display of these virtues and graces, distinguished the confessors in the persecuted primitive church, or the bright but stormy dawn of reformation from popery.

It will also be not less judicious than candid, in discourse with such a man, to advance one step farther in concession. With regard to many an absurd superstitious notion, many a formal hypocritical pretension and practice, repugnant to the spirit of the gospel, to true protestantism, to the doctrines of the most illustrious supporters of the credit of our church, it has pleased heaven to make some of the most virulent and least clear-sighted of this unbelieving tribe the unconscious instruments of real service to the cause of truth, by exposing to just contempt and detestation

detestation the extreme folly and evil tendency of those corruptions of it. The unwonted rashness of their late attacks has seasonably betrayed to the eyes of all, on which side they have expected to find religion most vulnerable. It is thus they have taught us the best mode of defending it. Against those adventitious mixtures, which have dimmed the pure light, and impeded the natural efficacy of the gospel doctrines, a gracious Providence has permitted them to strike with most violence and apparent success.

That eternal rock of transparent adamant, which approved it's unperishable substance against the rudest shocks it sustained from the joint rage of the Jewish Sadducees, Pharisees and Scribes, and the fiery trial of the Grecian Sophists, or of Roman persecutors, has nothing now to fear from the assaults, it withstands from Atheists or Enthusiasts, or both unnaturally leagued against it. To this age of *Infidelity*, as many an affrighted good soul, in anguish stiles it, is allotted it's appointed period. An Age of *Reason*, (as persons of an opposite cast of thought esteem it,)

it,) you will not allow it to be properly called, as yet. Heaven only knows how soon it may be justly entitled an Age of fair and free *Inquiry*. Let us, though sorrowing, yet resigned, though full of boding apprehension, yet cheered with rays of comfortable hope, anticipate the day, when Christianity shall be unanimously embraced; not as a series of contentious speculations, but as a complete unadulterated system of most interesting but plainest principles, of everlasting importance, intelligible to all minds, endeared to the affections of every good man. “* Then shall the hearts of all that trust in God, be joyful in his salvation. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the Lord shall set up an ensign for the nations, and assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.” Of these fatal aberrations, (though each perhaps at first was venial, and harmless, as unattended yet with that train of rancorous and malignant passions, to which they insensibly gave rise,) too

* Isaiah xi. 12, 13.

long the world has rued the consequences. May God in mercy grant it then may hear no more of them.

A worse effect of these mad deviations from the mild spirit of the gospel, more pernicious than the angry strife they kindle, more afflictive to the rational and sincere christian than even the ridiculous triumphs they afford to the sneering infidel, is the encreasing progress of those distracted contenders against reason and virtue before noted, and their success in leading multitudes astray from it's righteous, pure and saving doctrines. Upon these you will still insist with the half-reclaimed, but again revolting Libertine. You will declare them as they were delivered by the Saviour of mankind to men of simple unpolluted hearts, and minds unperplexed with the subtleties of false learning, mystical jargon, or worldly wisdom. It would then be most seasonable, and no longer a difficult task to make him fully comprehend a truth, of which he was never before aware, a truth over which an inveterate habit of torturing the plain sense of scripture,
into

into pretended meanings impossible to be vindicated, or rendered at all intelligible, has in all christian churches, contributed, more or less, to cast a shade.

It is thus alone you will make him sensible that the keenest shafts of infidelity, which have occasionally taken effect on those contentious glosses, have never once glanced, in the slightest degree, upon true religion. That heavenly guide reveals to benighted man, in the clearest light, the only path, which leads to perfection and happiness, from which poor purblind mortals are continually striking aside into utter darkness. A more inexplicable mystery scarce occurs, than this, either in the natural works of the Deity, in his revealed word, or in the marvelous dispensations of his moral government. How is it conceivable, that the All-powerful, wise and good Creator should call forth into being a creature endued with perception, intelligence, reason, should invite him to the contemplation of the most important truths, should impress them in lively characters on his mind, as of prime concern to his present, his future, his
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eternal welfare? These blessed privileges, these inestimable endowments, how is it imaginable the Divine Providence should suffer man so woefully to pervert, by blending his own extravagant fancies with the ever-sacred word of God, natural or revealed, in such manner as to confound and deaden all its salutary effect? This we know too well has ever been the consequence of his involving in obscurity its most luminous truths, its most important moral injunctions, in a distracting war of words, "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

To the most intelligible and heart-felt suggestions of eternal verity, what is the ranting enthusiast pleased to substitute? What he proclaims to be the essence, the whole constituent substance of his faith, nay the fundamental *doctrines* of all religion, though they really *teach* him nothing, since upon these no two men, no, not any one man long together, has precisely affixed the same construction. Thus it is, and thus it ever will be, when mortal man presumes to be something more than mortal, to be wise, or pretend
to

to knowledge, not only “* *above that which is written,*” above what Scripture has plainly revealed, but above that which God, who ordained his station, or decreed the condition of his existence here, has thought fit to grant him faculties to know.—Dissatisfied with the light of reason, as too dim to assist him sufficiently in exploring the depths of divine wisdom, turning aside from that of revelation itself, which expressly tells him —“† *they belong to the Lord our God alone,*” he soars, in his own conceit, above imparted knowledge, human or divine, is lost, sinks back into himself, avows an internal disregard for both, renounces all power of receiving light from either. His declared purpose is to penetrate, through all opposing difficulties, into brighter day. Mistaken wanderer! After long and ineffectual efforts, he is compelled, with humbler christians, to give the name of darkness to light inaccessible. Happy would it be for mankind, if they could all at length agree in this point,

* 1 Cor. iv. 6.

† Deut. xxix. 29.

and be contented with searching, in the Gospel itself, to understand what it really is, “* *a Light to lighten the Gentiles,*” to impart useful knowledge to the ignorant, “*a Salvation,*” a prime object of their hope and trust, “*prepared before the face of all people,*” set before the sight, and obvious to the apprehension of all intelligent and rational beings.

That in the written word of God, as in all nature, (his unwritten word,) are many things, which you do not, cannot comprehend, you have not presumed to deny. The only points, I have supposed you to have, (*too repeatedly*) occasion to inculcate, because they have been too injuriously to the credit of religion, obstinately contested still, are these.—It is extreme folly to enforce a perpetually disputed tenet, as a prime article of faith, necessary to salvation—It is withdrawing the attention due to truths clearly revealed, and therefore generally intelligible, because of universal concern.—It is bewildering in the mazy subtleties of un-

* Luke ii, 32.

availing controversy that mind, which Christ came into the world purposely to fix upon objects of immediate exigence, of eternal importance to it's present and future welfare.—Finally it is giving occasion to the adversaries of the Gospel to exult in saying, that, by our own confession, it is to us, and the sole grand object of our faith, no revelation at all.

It is by a clear and rational vindication alone—first, of the perspicuity—then of the purity, and lastly, of the transcendent excellence of the doctrines of christianity, that you will confute the most plausible objection of your half-converted, but suddenly relapsing Caviller. Having constantly found that the keenest invectives of this conceited free-thinker, this exclusive proprietor of all the reason in the world, are against implicit faith, you have observed them pointed with most insulting mockery at a blind prejudice in favour of notions avowedly inexplicable.—You have therefore patiently invited him to as accurate and strict an examination, as he has thought fit, of all your religious opinions,
independent

independent of the authority of any church or council, never doubting that if really derived from God they will stand the severest test of human scrutiny.—You have candidly required him to permit his contrary opinions to be as freely canvassed. This he could not deny without incurring the imputation of wilful blindness or unnatural bias, which he so bountifully bestowed on you.—He has been struck with inward shame, disguised in outward indignation, at being convicted of that very bigotry, the constant butt of his malignant ridicule, in his rejection, without inquiry, of what an impartial attention must have approved to his deliberate judgment, as worthy of God, and consonant to right reason.—You have brought him to submit to a mutually probing conference; in which you will have manifested yourselves as equitable and disinterested searchers after truth as he could ever pretend to be.—To an opponent of some erudition and discernment, you have evinced, by fair argument, that what he had hastily supposed, what weak enthusiasts have furiously maintained to constitute the whole essence of Christianity, is

as repugnant to the spirit and tenor of the Gospel-revelation, as it is to the clearest ideas we can form of the nature of things.—You have, in short, compelled your revolted proselyte to perceive, whether he is willing to acknowledge it, or not, that what you have been amicably contending for is plainly this: That in what we properly call the word of God is contained the sum of all the most momentous truths, relative to God, his nature, attributes, and works, his government and dealings with mankind, the decrees of his Providence in respect to their past, present and future state, the sanctions of the Laws, that he ordained to regulate the whole duty of man, as relative to himself, to other men, to his Creator, Sovereign, Law-giver and Judge, and finally the hope of everlasting life, imparted by Christ, our Redeemer, of which the most exalted human mind, before his coming, had scarce ever obtained a dubious glimpse, but which to the humblest is now “fully brought to light in the gospel.”—If obstinately persisting still in his career of impiety he is become incurably deaf to the voice of heaven,

heaven, of conscience, of reason, all farther attempts to reclaim him are, for the present, utterly superseded. You see him rushing irrecoverably on to his final perdition.

SECTION IV.

Case utterly desperate.

IF this simplicity of religious truth, enforced, as it is hoped it will have been, with resistless evidence, shall have only excited the hardened Infidel to exhibit the more his rooted aversion to it, in his former invectives, the case is desperate; your pious task is at an end. It is when delivered in it's genuine purity, without disguise, or adventitious mixture, that the word of God "searches the very heart and reins," discloses each lurking vice, in it's darkest recesses, and the sources of his inveterate rancour against it in the foulness of his real character and principles. After being engaged so long in a hopeless contest with an opponent of this obdurate profligacy, thus convicted of being habitually

bitually alienated from virtue and godliness, ere he commenced his frantic assault against the majesty of heaven, you will at length too sensibly perceive that you have been wasting your friendly care upon a callous wretch, whose blindness and obduracy, he alone who formed the heart as well as the eye, can cure. You have, in fact, been combating, as his decided actuating principles, what have no positive influence at all, in the direction of his conduct, and no longer any existence now in a mind wholly palsied and dead to all sense of right and wrong, though fatally alive alone to ungovernable passion.

Let it be your comfort, that by your temperate address, and meek demeanour, so opposite to his own, you have not sought to brave or exasperate his brutal insolence. It has unhappily failed to engage his attention to the righteous cause; and your soundest arguments, however unanswerably they have confuted, have not at all convinced him. Defeated and cast down to earth again and again, Antæus-like, he has instantly sprung

up, with undiminished obstinacy of resistance, from which he will not shrink till his impiety expires with his last breath. You will, at any rate, have done your duty, as the faithful servants of your meek Redeemer. Look up to Him, the "Captain of your Salvation," for the effect, and partial success of your charitable endeavours to restore this rebellious son to the pardon and acceptance of the Almighty Sovereign, but most Gracious Father of the universe. Far be it from you to assign a limit to the mercy of his compassionate Creator and Judge. But you are warranted both from reason and scripture to declare, that a right spirit can never be renewed in that breast, without a miraculous display of the divine power, by a new creation. To the boundless goodness of that God, "*who alone worketh great marvels,*" you will resign that efficacy of persuasion, which exceeds all power of human eloquence.

CON-

CONCLUDING CHAPTER.

Exhortations to the Younger Clergy.

SECTION I.

Preservative against infection.

HAVING traced the mockery of the Libertine, through it's several stages, from it's first rise to it's last fatal extreme, and faintly intimated the most probable method of proceeding towards a cure of this pestilent mischief, till every gleam of hope is utterly extinguished, we are prepared religiously to observe the earnest exhortation of St. Paul, "to walk circumspectly, lest by any means our minds be corrupted from the simplicity, which
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is in Christ.*" An answer is ready to our only remaining inquiry: What are the best preservatives, to secure us from all taint of the like infection ourselves?

Let us first establish a deep and firm impression in our hearts of the unnatural state of that soul, which the wisdom and goodness of it's Almighty Author originally endued with such excellent faculties, when it loses all sense of duty, of reverence, of love to him. It embraces misery, deformity, disgrace: yet in the very pangs of disappointment, in the horrors and agonies of despair itself, it only regrets it's inability to enjoy them, persisting still to call them pleasure, beauty, and true glory. It's best affections, thus alienated beyond recovery from God and religion, thus transformed into degenerated and sinful habits, are doomed, like evil spirits, to haunt and distract it, and at length utterly to disqualify it for the enjoyment of peace or comfort more. Continually beset with evils on every side, it has rejected from

* 2 Cor. xi. 3.

himself

himself for ever the sole support, and sovereign remedy, which the wise Controller of his nature has ordained to be afforded under them.

Let us next relieve our eyes from the painful contemplation of these adversaries of religion and sound reason. Let us raise them, with a stedfast attention and respect, to the most generally distinguished for superior talents, an extensive compass of acquired knowledge, solidity and strength of judgment embellished with every cardinal virtue, Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude, all exerted, with becoming zeal, in the righteous cause, and for the common good; we shall find them to have been constantly eminent alike for the profound veneration they have paid to the acknowledged Ruler of their destiny. Their successes they have constantly ascribed to their Creator, Preserver and eternal Friend, their abilities to the "Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh," the source of their existence, and of all that is beautiful, great and excellent in the universe.

It

It is by setting thus before our eyes, in striking contrast, the natural and necessary influence of these opposite characters on the welfare, peace and comfort of mankind, that we obtain the most persuasive evidence, the most lively perception of the reality of sacred truth. Mark well the clear and full result of the comparison. How hateful, how despicable, how disgraceful to their species, are the wretches unrestrained by any principle, moral or religious, that compose the former group ! How highly venerated, and full of glory is the faithful band of eminently virtuous and pious worthies ! how gratefully celebrated by all that itself is laudable in the admiring world ! Willing or not to tread in the same honourable track, all are compelled to acknowledge, and happy to enjoy the benefit of their useful lives.

SECTION II.

Examples presented in succession.

THE most early sages of Pagan Antiquity, habituated to trace the vestiges of
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the wonderful phenomena, the beneficent effects of well adapted second causes, displayed in the *natural* world, were impelled to adore the supreme power, goodness and wisdom of some Unknown First Cause. An ever-restless curiosity awakened by degrees into piety, which every new extension of their discoveries, improved by reflection, exalted more and more. In the contemplation indeed of the moral world great and lamentable confusion presented itself, which occasionally drove their minds into painful perplexity. To an eye attentive only to this transitory scene, it was but a feeble ray, that unassisted reason could afford to overcome this grievous difficulty. Yet though it sometimes staggered, it seldom overset their well-established principles. The idea of a supremely intelligent and powerful Arbiter of all events, calamitous or prosperous, was ever present to their minds.

You have beheld them often led by propitious heaven, in reward for their sincerity of heart, to a more successful track of inquiry. You have observed them

them labouring first with anxious surmises, then suddenly struck with some cheering intimations of a future state, where all these irregular dispensations of good and evil may possibly be compensated. But as those uncertain glimmerings of an approaching dawn sprang up in their minds, together with them rose the mists of doubt and fear. These often dimmed, but appear not ever to have totally quenched those inspiriting gleams of hope. To the twinkling lamp of philosophy they had still recourse anew. It seemed, at one instant, in earnest to dispel, but at the next, by fits, to counterfeit a sadder gloom, beguiling their defeated, though honourable researches, between shade and shining. You may recollect, in numberless instances, how spirited, how laudable were the efforts of these excellent men; yet how precarious, how almost hopeless to vindicate the dark and intricate plans of that Providence, which with a steady purpose of soul, they still revered. These eagle-eyed sages, to whom, by a learned education, you have, of course, been led to look up, with due respect, it is now the mode, as well for the fashionable

fashionable tribes of ignorant and empty praters, as for the stupid adherents to implicit faith, strangely to depreciate. Yet how worthy of commendation and esteem are these ardent, though unsuccessful searchers after truth, when contrasted with the noxious insect-swarms of modern philosophers, against whose increasing insolence you may now expect to be daily, by profession, called upon to engage, unless you are rather inclined to turn away your aching sense, with impatience and disgust.

But let us now, with renovated hearts, pass on to that unclouded day, when "** the Sun of Righteousness arose, with healing in his wings,*" to display the present, past and future counsels of our God, and at his new creative word, to bring life and immortality to light. Let us, with recovered comfort, and established vigour of principle, review, as they pass in bright succession, the lives of the most distinguished Saints and Martyrs of the primitive Church. We see them dispen-

* Malachi, iv. 2.

sing through the faded twilight of pagan wordly-wisdom, the celestial day-spring from on high, as they received it directly reflected on them by "the express image of his Father's glory." Lament we must the unhappy change, which their Successors exhibited, by their departure from the simplicity of evangelical truth, in the century immediately subsequent to that of this auspicious era*. This fatal defection from it's original purity, clearly predicted in holy scripture, first arose from the temporising spirit of it's preachers, who sought to accommodate the Christian doctrine with the tales of the heathen priesthood, and the dreams, the fictions, not the solid, the rational tenets of their philosophers, whilst *for every valuable remnant of ancient literature, that bore the stamp of true genius, and sound wisdom, they insensibly lost all respect.* †

Thus

* See Joh. Alphonsi Turretini Orat. Acad. de variis Christ. doctr. fatis, where the corruptions of Christianity are exhibited with learning and judgment.

† Have not your minds, both learned and rational, as well as pious, been often disagreeably struck, on observing

Thus triumphant over the powers of reason, and of revelation, "*ingenium suum præceps ecclesiæ sacramenta fecerunt,*" says Jerom, in his Commentary on Isaiah. In their progress of apostacy from both, they retained at length of Christ's holy institution only a few indistinct and shadowy forms, accompanied with a stunning gibberish of pretended tenets, utterly unconceivable, and such as would have been rejected by the blessed Apostles, with amazement and indignation. They are still, professedly at least, held sacred in a church, the approaching downfal of which, well-nigh completed, you must expect to hear many a brother, of pious affections, and weak judgment, piteously deplore ; as if the foundations of religion and truth could be shaken, their very existence endangered, by the discomfiture of error and bigotry.

observing this shameful tendency, so commonly prevalent at this day, though not without many honourable exceptions, among the higher orders of our countrymen ? Has it not grieved you to hear them decry what their ancestors, two centuries ago, understood how to esteem right well, and properly ?

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It is painful to look back upon the disastrous ages, that followed this defection. The ever-restless ambition of degenerate churchmen perpetually fomented every other more malignant passion, when exalted into favour, at the courts, and admitted into the cabinet intrigues of weak and wicked Sovereigns. They established by degrees their spiritual tyranny over the understandings and consciences of men. They conspired the more effectually to banish real Christianity from the face of the earth, by substituting instead of it, and under it's name, a worse than pagan superstition, by granting to a blind reverence for them indulgences for every crime, and to external shews of piety a dispensation from all moral duties. They so far accomplished their fatal purpose, that a comparison of the dismal state of those times with the present might, upon a little sedate reflection, easily convince our most afflicted and repining zealot, that his wonted surmise is a false one. Neither is the degraded state of moral principles sunk so low, at this day, as it was then; nor is the light of the gospel so apparently

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fading away, and menacing a speedy departure from the earth, as in those ages of profound ignorance and mad superstition. The dreaded object of his apprehension, the return of a general mental darkness, proceeding from the succels of our lawless neighbours in the overthrow of all religious establishments is, I trust, most unlikely to take place, in this country especially, either in this, or any future period.

The baleful cause, which is always similar in it's operations, in this imperfect state of humanity, counteracted then, and still counteracts, but by the blessing of God, with enfeebled malignity, the force of divine Truth. In that distant dark epocha, it was extreme licentiousness and profligacy of manners, consequent upon the grossest Superstition countenanced by sovereign authority, issuing from the corrupt centre of government, in degenerate and enslaved Rome, that diffused that general disposition to substitute, for the genuine purity of the gospel, an implicit observance of insignificant ceremonies, and empty forms of doctrine, alike

alike inapplicable to the heart and understanding, which pervaded every province of it's vast empire. This defiance and solemn mockery of the majesty of heaven, was permitted to proceed from bad to worse, till the measure of their iniquities was full, and brought on the penal blindness that ensued. Then it was that it's tardy vengeance commissioned first the Goths and Vandals, and afterwards the Saracens to become the instruments of offended justice, by involving the guilty nations in confusion and darkness more permanent, and terrible in it's consequences, than that which the impieties of Pharaoh brought down upon his afflicted subjects.

Let us relieve our grievous researches through this vast gloom of overwhelming ignorance, by seeking to trace, at varied intervals, the distinguishable footsteps of many a venerable confessor, who animated with the spirit of piety, undissembled and sincerely christian integrity, became patterns of wisdom, truth and virtue, worthy of that general imitation, which they were most unlikely to inspire

in their turbulent and lawless, or abject and servile contemporaries. The tumult of their conflicting factions, the distractive influence of each prevailing sect, all equally averse from what St. Paul has styled "** the end of the commandment,*" were foes alike "*to Charity, out of a pure heart, of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, from which some having swerved, (Note here the caution of this heavenly commissioned monitor,) have turned aside into vain jangling ; desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.*"

You must have observed, in all the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, that the articles of faith, which are there propounded, are few and simple, and appear, at first sight, level to the capacity of every sound heart, and plain understanding. Of their sophistication by the addition of novel notions, and various disfigurements of these at every fresh coinage, there is scarcely a page in the histories we have alluded to, which has

* 1 Tim. i. 5, 6, 7.

not astonished you with instances of strange exorbitance. "They converted Theology into an Art or subtle trade of mystery," says an eloquent and eminently judicious Father.* The faith was no longer that of the gospel, but a mere formulary, or peculiar mode of speech, or external ritual, in current use at some particular time and place.

Among their many novel modes, upon which, as rocks of offence, (σκανδαλα,) you have, no doubt, occasionally stumbled in your theological studies, allow me to indicate one, the occasion of which was natural enough, but the effects were singularly striking; the adoration, I mean, of some favourite Saint, among the crowd of canonized polemics, commonly the most vehement stickler for some abstruse doctrine, then fiercely defended, but since confuted, obsolete, or duly consigned to the dust of oblivion. You will trace, with the highest degree of probability, the origin of this worship devoutly paid to those

* Basil, (of Cæsarea.) His words are τεχνολογῶσιν
ἐν τῇ θεολογίᾳ.

ancient

ancient champions of implicit faith in revelation unrevealed. You will find it in the oratorical rants of their enthusiastical preachers, now disgustingly imitated in our modern tabernacles. Even the celebrated Sermons of a Chrysostom, a Gregory of Nazianze are not without many Apostrophes like the following—
 “O thou blessed Spirit, if thou art permitted by Almighty God to have cognizance of our affairs here below, to be present at this assembly, to attend to this discourse, to hear the prayers, to read, with intuitive perception, the thoughts of this faithful people.”

In what sense that same *faithful people* commonly took these bold figures of speech, became soon apparent in the obvious effects on weak and credulous minds. To the ceaseless adoration of some adopted Saint, in total exclusion of the respect due to the only God, they added of course a preference of human tenets to the Divine Word, or esteemed the latter only as it could be made subservient to interpret, and establish the former. The empire of monkery, arising from this
 crazy

crazy superstition, was allowed by Providence, for purposes inscrutable by wisdom less than heavenly, to extend itself insensibly in all parts of the christian world. It became every where the devoted abettor of the usurpation of Pontiffs, immersed in secular intrigues, who fomented party-rage, and perpetual feuds, not less civil than ecclesiastical, with no other view than to exalt their own dominion. It grew itself into power, reputation for sanctity, and a monopoly of the little learning, yet subsisting among mankind, the rest was lost amidst universal barbarism, or most profound stupidity,

Hear the candid confession of the wretched ignorance of those times, which the force of truth extorts from a celebrated Cardinal, a powerful supporter of the church, and a candidate, well-nigh successful, for the Papal chair. Hear even him declare his painful sense of the abomination of desolation established in the temple of the Lord. “* God ap-

* See Annals of Baronius, about the end of the 9th Century.

peared,

peared, in this dark age, to have forsaken his church. Christ lay sunk in deep sleep in his storm-beaten bark, whilst there was no one by to awaken him." That by several such passages as this, he should have incurred so little the displeasure of the supporters of Sacerdotal despotism, manifestly the principal cause of the said profound ignorance, can thus alone be accounted for: Well-appriized of their temper, craft and policy, he knew exactly all he had to fear, when compelled here and there to pay a brief homage at the shrine of Truth: He was cautious to qualify it so, that he might never be suspected of any undutiful intention against the papal authority. As subtle an apologist, upon occasion, for a mean temporizer, as * Edmund Waller, in the celebrated Dialogues of a learned and ingenious Prelate, he would not for the world have you to think, he meant slyly to insinuate, that what the adoring multitude looked up to as the sole infallible guide to Truth, was in fact the invincible guardian of established error.

* See Hurd's Dialogues, Moral and Political.

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Through this long trance, in which alike lay prostrate both human reason and divine revelation, they exhibited nevertheless, from time to time, amid suspended signs of life, some apparent presage of a destined revival. A plain unlettered man of Dauphiny, Peter de Valdo, of a character not unressembling that of the first Apostles, appeared in the twelfth century. A fervent zeal for the simplicity of the evangelical doctrines, a declared enmity to all constraint on private conscience, he tempered and rendered respectable by an unbounded charity, and the strictest moral purity. Of these graces he was indeed a shining pattern. He inveighed against the tyranny of superstition with great fortitude, seconded soon by a numerous band of followers in Languedoc. Short was the success of an attempt conducted with too little regard to human prudence. Calamitous and horrible was the issue of their opposition to the exterminating rage of popery.

It was little more than a century after the heinous massacres, committed by the frantic satellites of established abuse and error,

error, upon these intelligent and pious, though illiterate maintainers of the pure faith in Christ, that arose our more enlightened Countryman Wickleff, who, in the fourteenth, imparted to the world, with a permanent effect, that liberty of access to the pure word of God, and asserted that general right of interpreting the same, by the light of each man's private reason and conscience, from which all ranks of men had long submitted to be debarred. The resistless energy of his instructions, communicated to his German adherents, Hus, and Jerom, and through them to countless tribes of serious and sincere disciples, in every part of Europe, in the fifteenth, extended far and wide, and illustrated by their bright examples, too numerous to be recounted here, the progress of that reformation.

To the farther advancement of the blessed restoration of genuine Christianity in the sixteenth century, two very different causes marvelously concurred. The dispersion westward of the learned Grecians, by the Turkish invaders of their country, opened suddenly to the wonder-
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ing eyes of the western nations, the hidden treasures of ancient knowledge, not of the Greek alone and the Hebrew, but of the long slighted, and almost forgotten Latin Literature. The strangeness of their unsought apparition from the grave attracted general curiosity and admiration. They did more. In all, who were not disqualified by dissipation, indolence, or natural incapacity, they excited, what we see they still excite, in a less degree, at this day, when presented to any mind, that can boast *divinæ particulam auræ*, an ardent desire; first, to investigate minutely and critically the various beauties of those rare productions of cultivated genius. They dwelt on them with rapturous delight, they strove to emulate themselves those very excellencies, which the fashionable sons of dullness, and the uneducated gabblers among the methodists alone, are now affecting to depreciate.

The other cause alluded to, as mighty in immediate operation, and more potent and fortunate still in future consequences, was the invention of Printing; how seasonably, how providentially brought forth
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at this auspicious period ! Can we enough express our pious gratitude for that benign dispensation, which ordained this admirably useful invention to spread the public distribution, not of those inestimably precious treasures only of antique wisdom, but of those also, which the glowing hearts, and studious heads of their illustrious imitators, almost instantaneously, produced ? It happily placed the acquisition of these treasures within the reach of the less elevated and less affluent, who perchance may sometimes be not the least liberal and noble-minded members of the learned professions. Though often grossly perverted, and productive of occasional mischief, though a formidable object of jealousy even to a righteous, but perhaps unpopular government, may it's transcendent benefits, upon the whole, be universally acknowledged, and it's liberty remain for ever uncontrolled, except by a necessary regard to the paramount and eternal laws, that regulate our duties to God and man.

You may here again look back, with admiration and reverence, to the sudden resurrection

resurrection of religion and learning from the death-like trance of many ages, to which it greatly contributed by the providential conversion of the pursuits of intelligent men, eagerly engaged at first in exciting the public attention to the ancient models of polite literature, but prompted to the nobler and more important employment of setting forth accurate editions and illustrations of the most justly celebrated expounders and enforcers of the great practical truths and duties of natural and revealed religion.

Thus far has panegyric held it's due course. But it may here be proper to interrupt it for less pleasing objects of attention. Let your esteem and gratitude for the bold attempts, the well-directed labours, the valuable discoveries of these worthies be regulated by matured and impartial judgment. They were, in truth, not always consistent, or alike successful. Of their unexampled application to their beloved studies, of their zealous endeavours, and strict attention to clear the simple doctrines of the gospel from the loads of rubbish, under which
they

they had so long been buried, of their intrepid constancy in maintaining it's genuine spirit, in opposition to the cruel threats, and sanguinary inflictions of spiritual and civil tyranny, You cannot think too highly. Wonderfully raised they were, in these respects, above the ordinary pitch of human approaches to perfection. Yet were the very best and wisest of them frail and imperfect mortals still. They were deficient in many points, which the less earnest and indefatigable, but more fortunate industry of several succeeding generations, down to the present times, have abundantly supplied.

To one palpable, one most discreditable error of theirs, every consistent protestant, with deep concern, beholds them at times unaccountably shrinking back: A declared renunciation of the original and fundamental principle of the Reformation, with respect to the rights of private judgment. We are amazed to see those very men, to whom we have lately looked up with so much reverence, as highly exalted above human frailty, so suddenly degraded to it's lowest pitch.

When

When arrived at their prime of strength and dignity—can we believe it?—they betrayed in strange symptoms even of an apparent depravity of heart, to what horrid extremities opinionative pride and self-will, inflamed by a spirit of party, could impel the yet ungovernable minds of distinguished Confessors. What a home-felt lesson is here presented to you, ye sincere and fervent young Ministers of the Gospel of peace! What a mortifying sense must it raise of human weakness, and the mischief of impetuous passions, when we behold these renowned assertors of the glory of their Lord and Master, and the perfect purity of his doctrine, thus atrociously insult him, by apostatizing from that first law of meekness and mutual forbearance, by which alone he declared his willingness to acknowledge a true disciple?

It may be sufficient here to exhibit to your view a few instances of their most heinous deviations from this gracious law. However reluctant to proceed to this painful consideration, you must allow it to be no unsuitable digression; but properly

perly appertaining to the subject of this Address. If you are sincerely solicitous to persuade the adversaries of our holy religion to entertain a more respectful opinion of it, let them see that it enjoins you to condemn, with yet greater severity than themselves, that intolerant spirit, that disgraces the character of each fierce polemic. You cannot declare too strongly your horror at the unchristian fury of a *Calvin* condemning to the flames a zealous Unitarian*, of exemplary morals, and eminently useful talents, for speaking differently from him, upon a point, above the apprehension of either:—your astonishment at the inconceivable approbation of this shocking sentence by the mild *Melancthon*:—at the insulting calmness of a *Zwinglius*, when sentencing a poor Anabaptist *Heretic* to be drowned in the Elbe, with this cool taunt, “*qui iterum mergit mergatur* ;” just at the time when a Lutheran *Schismatic* was condemning a Zwinglian *Separatist* to the like fate:—at the very prime champion for the rights of conscience, *Luther*, na-

* Servetus.

turally of a fiery temper, yet not liking to imbrue his hands in the blood of the Zwinglians or Calvinists, contenting himself with gently recommending to his gracious Patron, the Elector of Saxony, to issue against them the soft Arrêt of a perpetual imprisonment in the darkest cells of a mad-house.—Over the lamented variations of a *Crammer*, from his first profession, fain would you cast a veil: but his most flagrant inconsistency, must not escape your severest censure, his dooming a weak female Arian * to the same death at a stake, which so soon after awaited himself.—Of the extreme cruelties inflicted on the Arminian party by the Gomarists in the Seven Provinces, upon the Puritans and Presbyterians, in England, during the first five reigns of our Protestant Sovereigns, you will be careful to obtain ample information, by investigating their history more at large, than you would endure to see it admitted in this slight Address.—

* Joan Bocher.

E c

Let

Let it urge you to pursue the subject seriously, under the guidance of a Fuller, a Neale, a Heylin, a Rushworth, a Burnet, a Jortin, a Lardner, a Mosheim. It is indeed most requisite that you should be fully apprized to what shameful enormities, a tyrannical passion for enforcing particular modes of worship, faith, or discipline, on the one hand, and a rancorous opposition to them, on the other, has driven different sects of Protestants, each rationally claiming for itself, but most irrationally seeking to preclude all the rest from a safe and unmolested enjoyment of their own persuasion. You will then be fully aware of the expediency of acquiring this knowledge before you engage in the task of reclaiming a reasoning Infidel, or a Bigotted foe to common sense, to salutary truth, or sedate reflection.

You will then be happily relieved from a difficulty most embarrassing to the conscientious asserter of any *particular* or exclusive system of religious tenets, be it ever so defensible, in its most essential parts, when it shall be universally agreed
that

that in every *human institution*, error and imperfection will assuredly be discernible in some point or other. A more honourable service cannot be done to our excellent Church establishment, which we esteem the most perfect, upon the whole, that was ever yet framed by the utmost effort of human intellect, assisted by the word of God, than by a frank and open declaration, that we are ever ready to permit, to invite, nay generously to encourage every fair and liberal canvas of all it's parts, of those especially, in which suspicion lies of any possible defect. It was thus the fairest Edition of a most invaluable production of cultivated human genius issued from the press*, without a single blemish. The truly honourable Editor, by a similar confident invitation, and promise of reward for the severest scrutiny, manifested thus to the world how sincerely his heart and spirit were engaged in bringing the work to perfection.

* Virgilii Opera ap. Aldum.

SECTION III.

Precautions.

THEN, and then only, " * shall the path of the just be as the shining light, that shineth ever more and more, unto the perfect day ; " when resigning " to † God the things, which belong unto God," the children of men, shall attend to the things which alone belong unto them, which from the moment they are *actually revealed*, are of course *no longer mysterious*. Then shall all men of a sound understanding cease at once to contend for a fanciful uniformity of opinion, in matters, about which the human mind really can form no opinion at all. From pronouncing peremptorily upon these we are withheld by the same God, who declares, by his Preacher, that " † Pride was not made for man." Then shall his faithful worshippers, with one accord, range themselves

* Prov. iv. 18.

† Deut. xxix. 29.

‡ Eccl. x. 18.

on the side of Christ, leaving to the devoted adherents of an Arius, or Athanasius, a Pelagius, or Augustin, a Luther, or Bellarmine, a Calvin or Socinus, a Zinzendorff, or Swedenborg, a Whitfield, or Priestley, the folly of calling themselves after the names of such Masters, as being but frail mortals all, must be liable to be sometimes strangely in the wrong. The silly habit of perpetuating these marks of party distinction, the truly catholic, or universal church will thenceforward indignantly disallow.

Ever blessed be the day, when all it's members shall heartily unite in exhorting their brethren to regard every one under that endearing relation, who "nameth the name of Christ, and departeth from iniquity." Then indeed shall we engage, with unanimous consent, in one common cause, the establishment of the kingdom of our universal Lord, in glory to God on high, in righteousness, peace and goodwill towards men. Without this, all speculative notions are an idle dream, every formulary a senseless jargon, all external profession an impudent mockery
of

of earth and heaven. In the church of England, to which, on maturest inquiry, you will find the character of christian moderation is more justly assigned than to any other, of human institution, (a few fiery wranglers and imposing dogmatists excepted *,) there is a solid fund of intrinsic wisdom that gives it the surest promise of becoming the general reconciler of all the rest, to her laudable example. It's bitterest enemies will then no longer insultingly say it's present peace is owing only to it's long immersion in sleep profound†. Many a menacing storm it has hitherto weathered in safety. The present will soon be over-blown, and a new day-spring rise with clearer and more permanent splendour than before.

Let us, in the mean time, abide for ever steady in our faith, and maintain unshaken our trust in the everlasting sanction of a divine promise, dismissing all fear-

Who still apparent *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*

† *Poss. d. t. caetera pontus.*

Ovid.

ful

ful apprehension that the same gracious Providence, which laid the foundation of our holy religion shall ever cease to watch over it's safety, amid the most alarming shocks of temporary confusion and madness. It's glory has been ever enhanced by the most rigid scrutiny. The most opprobrious cavil, the keenest wit, the most malignant ridicule have all reluctantly combined to maintain it's credit with the most confirmed and clearest evidence, to every unbiaſſed and enlightened judgment. At every fresh trial, it has prosperously disengaged itself from some strange encumbrance, absurdly superadded to it by conceited ignorance, without relinquishing a tittle of any one essential, or truly important part. It is manifest that, in so doing, it has always raised it's dignity and consequence to a greater height. It is now better known, and well understood to be altogether agreeable to reason, to be reason itself, not depreciated, but exalted, and made perfect, not involved in obscurity, but illuminated the more, by the word of God. The freest discussion has enforced the most general conviction that upon
it's

it's genuine doctrines and precepts the mockery of the Infidel could never fasten. It has been all the while encountering the illusion of some distempered brain.

Let us especially, whom our profession peculiarly engages to defend our holy faith from the captious sophisms of the pretended free-thinker, and the scoffs of the shameless libertine, search out that faith, as we shall find it delivered pure and undefiled, in the Scriptures themselves. To this work we must approve our sincere application by great earnestness, and persevering diligence. We know too well the strange disputes, which have been raised, by various modes, one of which only is right, of interpreting the same text. The objections drawn from these disputes you will undergo the most irksome labour in confuting. When seriously called upon to answer them, you will manifest your attachment to no *heretical* party, only by insisting absolutely upon nothing but what by your own strict and perfectly unbiassed examination you have found clearly revealed in the word of God.

The

The sacred word alone you will generally find the best expounder to itself. Investigate minutely the connection of the abstruser texts, and their relation to the precedent and following sentences. Compare the parallel passages, and observe attentively how each one casts encreasing light upon the other. Your Cruden's Concordance, with Bishop Gaftrill's Christian Institutes will be here a ready assistant, to your reflection, no less than to your memory. Compare the intricate with the plainer texts, the similar in sound with those, which bear a less resemblance in sense; nor rest, till all their imputed dissonance is completely harmonized, to your entire satisfaction, which if your hearts are in the work, you can very seldom fail to obtain. Keep continually in your eye the fairest model of the most proper method of Scriptural Criticism, as set forth by Mr. Locke, in his "*Essay for the understanding St. Paul's Epistles by consulting St. Paul himself.*" You will be convinced, upon accurate and earnest trial, that each individual sacred writer, repeatedly perused, with attention, from beginning to end, will be found

found your surest guide, your best commentator upon himself; where the dim illustrations of puzzled critics have only perplexed you with crude conceits, and conjectures of their own, that keep the pure originals almost utterly out of sight.

You have heard much complaint of *"the difficulties and discouragements which attend the study of the Scriptures in the way of private judgment."* These are drawn with peculiar strength and liveliness, in a masterly pamphlet, so entitled, by Dr Hare, then a private presbyter of the church of England. He appears to have been zealously desirous, in his humbler station, to shew that since the study of the Scriptures is our indispensable duty, it concerns all christian societies to remove, as much as possible, such *"discouragements."* But he was afterwards promoted to the See of Chichester, and probably from that more elevated post, he might discern impediments in the way of the wished removal of those discouragements, which had not occurred to him before. The admirable good sense and candour, displayed in that ingenious work, did not
preserve,

preserve, at that time, the man, who had the confidence to say, nay even to bring shrewd arguments to prove that what one sect esteems irrational, another styles the orthodox faith, what nevertheless perhaps no individual has ever regarded constantly in the same light, is not in all particulars founded upon a nice and critical knowledge of the scriptures: not the force of heart-felt truth itself could preserve so bold a Son of the church from the bitter censures of his brethren. You will not wonder at this treatment of such a work, which made it's first appearance when the still small voice of reason was drowned in the loud applause bestowed, by the abettors of a corrupt faction in this realm, upon the despicable rants of a *Sacbeverel*. Some were mortified at *Haré's* application of superior talents to a study, that seemed ready to tear off the veil from a supposed established system of mystical theology, which they were content to adore at a distance, without really casting one vacant look within it; others gravely affecting to blush at his unbecoming freedom of style upon a subject, that called for great reserve and solemnity.

Solemnity. But the most part inveighed, with seeming passion, at what they pretended to regard as a nefarious attempt to overturn that Church, whose true glory it was the writer's purpose to promote with his best abilities, by associating them with the labours of it's devoted and most enlightened sons, in bringing it nearer to perfection. This attempt, they saw, discountenanced their easier and more compendious method of solving all difficulties by a blind acquiescence, all doubts or scruples on questionable points, by the authority of catholic tradition.

He well knew the reception likely to await an undertaking, liable always to be regarded as a thankless office, at the best. He found it then peculiarly ungrateful, when the very name of the Church was become a mere watch-word of civil contention, among the great rabble and the small. This was deemed the most convenient instrument of faction to a party, which in their clamorous alarms for it's safety, were never seriously believed to entertain a real concern for it's substantial honour, much less for it's improvement.

The

The defence of the Protestant cause, and the principles derived from an earnest application to the study of the genuine sense and spirit of the holy writ, he saw they were content to leave to a more sequestered, and less presuming tribe, whose affections and genius led them to intense meditation upon matters most commonly slighted by men of their own cast, as bearing no relation to their worldly interests. No such clamour of Intolerance, would he probably have to encounter at this day. The unlimited claim of free inquiry, when guiltless of inflaming disaffection to the state, is in general presumed to be incontrovertible. Yet though the apprehension of danger, in the prosecution of it, is now well nigh done away, other *discouragements* remain, I mean the *difficulties*, attendant upon the arduous, and therefore much-neglected study, to which his delicate mode of suggestion was intended to excite you.

Fully aware of these difficulties himself, the good Doctor had seriously applied to it, with singular care. With great diligence he had acquired a previous knowledge

knowledge of the other numerous and abstruse parts of learning requisite to arrive at the precise meaning of the sacred text. In pursuing these important objects, to which he commands your strict attention, he was painfully struck with many more instances than are commonly supposed, of the faulty versions, and false interpretations capriciously wrested from them, to perplex, or give colour to the various clashing systems of scholastic and metaphysical theology. It was manifestly for the purpose of clearing the doctrine of revelation from such misconceptions, however enforced by fallible authority, that he traced a seemingly slight, though in fact a profoundly meditated outline of the extreme perplexities, into which all imposed professions, and established systems of belief without understanding, have drawn the entangled scriptural student, almost at his first setting out.

Should the same imputation light on your humble Addressee, which sometimes dishonest dulness, more commonly a party-spirit, seldom their malevolence call upon that

that excellent man, for apparently disparaging an ordinance of the church, by exhibiting to his pupil the difficulties, into which the shifting forms of a supposed determinate, but really unsettled orthodoxy, would not fail to lead him: permit me to add a proper vindication of Dr. Hare. Observe that he writes to an ingenuous youth of integrity, abilities, and spirit: (happy am I in supposing I am doing so now:) "*You have time before you, says the Dr. good eyes, a constitution in it's prime, a mind prepared for fatigue, a reasonable skill in the languages, and are furnished with a competent knowledge in all the parts of useful learning, that are preparatory to this study.*" The view of toils and difficulties, which he presented to such a youth was not likely to dishearten him in the least. When his right track was so clearly pointed out to him, it must have animated him to redouble his ardour in the glorious pursuit.

To check the arrogance—(of the learned, shall we say? no surely, for to the truly learned, severely reiterated lessons of humility have been long familiar, but)
of

of the superficial or empty declaimer upon what he has never taken the pains to consider for himself, it may be sufficient to set before him the slight sketch of the difficulties in question, as traced by the said masterly hand *. He deemed it expedient

* Allow me to subjoin it here in a note, that the mortified, yet still self-flattered Sciolist may, at leisure, survey it apart, if he shall not spurn it altogether, when he finds the task it imposes, too rigorous a strain upon his nerves, which are only inertly strong. The justness of it will agreeably approve itself to you, my more modest young Friends, "*quibus arte benignâ, et meliore luto finxit præcordia Titan.*" "*Nam reliquos fugienda patrum vestigia ducunt, et monstrata diu veteris strabit orbita culpe.*" And most natural, in truth, it is, that they should consent to be *led* or *drawn*, who are less willing than able to see, with their own eyes, their way before them. Only let these importunate sticklers for implicit faith in the wisdom of other men be made sensible that it becomes not them, to censure such men as Hare, as Clarke, as Locke, as Jortin, as Watson, as Paley, who have gratefully, piously exerted those faculties, with which a kind Providence has vouchsafed to endow them to inform their own, and guide the docile, but deliberate judgments of their sincere fellow christians. Attend to the sage precautions of the first named of these excellent men.

" ——— Such a thorough study of the Scriptures, as you aim at, is extremely difficult, and not to be successfully

pedient for him to pursue a different course, from that, which had led the ancient

“ successfully pursued without a very great and constant application, and a previous knowledge of many other parts of useful learning. The new testament cannot be understood without the old. The truths revealed in one are grounded on the prophecies contained in the other; which makes the study of the whole scriptures necessary to him, that would understand thoroughly a part of them. Nor can the Apocryphal books, how much soever they are generally slighted, be safely neglected; there being a great chasm of 500 years between the end of the prophets, and the beginning of the gospel; which period is of the greatest use for the understanding of the new testament, and yet is the least known. But now, if the old testament must be well studied, a good knowledge of the oriental tongues is absolutely necessary. No man can be ignorant, who knows any thing of letters, that no versions of old books can be thoroughly depended on; the mistakes are so many, and sometimes of great moment; especially the versions of books written in a language little understood, and many parts of it in a style extremely figurative, and those figures such as these parts of the world are almost wholly strangers to.

“ But put the case these difficulties were less than they are, is it an easy matter to add to Greek and Latin the knowledge of so many other languages? Do not they two alone find work enough for most scholars? What pains then must a man take, if he

“ will

ent Fathers and Councils into perplexed
and trackless mazes, where they took a
strange

" will study so many others besides? And if the
" knowledge of the old testament could be dispensed
" with, give me leave to tell you that the language
" even of the new testament is not to be understood
" with so little pains as is commonly imagined. It is
" learnt indeed at schools, and from thence thought
" to be the easiest Greek that can be read. But they
" who have read it in another manner than school-
" boys, know it to be quite otherwise. Not to men-
" tion the difficulties peculiar to St. Paul, whose
" epistles are a very great part of the new testament;
" Plato and Demosthenes are in many respects not so
" hard, as even the easier books. The style indeed
" in the historical books is plain and simple; but for
" all that even these parts too have their difficulty.
" And the whole is writ in a language peculiar to the
" Jews. The idiom is Hebrew or Syriac, though the
" words be Greek, which makes some knowledge of
" those languages still necessary.

" Again, though it were not necessary to read the
" old testament in the original, yet the Greek version
" of it must be read, and that carefully, it being oft-
" en times the best, if not the only help to explain
" the language of the new; besides that all citations
" in the new are generally made from it. But now,
" how laborious a thing must it be to study an ill
" version of a very hard book, which we cannot
" read in the original? I call it an ill version, for
" though, considering the time it was writ in, it be
" indeed a very good one, yet as a version, it must be
" allowed

strange delight in losing themselves. Through these, the truly-learned Origen himself, the most liberal and sagacious Critic of them all, was in occasional con-

"allowed by those who can judge of it, to be far from
 "being exact or true. A man need only consult it
 "on some hard places in the Pentateuch, as well as in
 "the poetic or prophetic books, to be convinced of
 "this. It was certainly far from perfect at first, and
 "is made much worse by the corruptions it has suffered
 "in handing down to us: so that I may venture to
 "affirm that should any body now-a-days make a
 "version so imperfect; instead of admiration and
 "esteem, his work would be much despised by most
 "of our modern critics.

"I might to these add many other difficulties that
 "attend a serious study of the new testament. It
 "requires a good knowledge of the Jewish state at the
 "time of our Saviour's coming, a knowledge of their
 "government, sanhedrim, synagogues, customs, tra-
 "ditions, opinions, sects, the kinds of learning re-
 "ceived among them, what they borrowed from the
 "Greeks, *when* their mystical and allegorical manner
 "of expounding the scriptures began, and on what
 "grounds, what their particular expectations were
 "in relation to the Messiah, and what they taught,
 "and on what grounds, in relation to angels, dæmons;
 "possessions, oracles, miracles, &c."

See the Difficulties and Discouragements which at-
 tend the Study, &c. Pages 5, 6, 7, of the 2d
 Edition, printed in 1714.

formity impelled sometimes to wander astray. Even he could not escape the general passion for darkness, and puzzled allegory, in preference to the clear light, and intelligible sense of the holy word. The failure in this respect of such a man should teach us all to be circumspect in the exercise of our private judgment, deliberate in our assent to the fallible authority of other men, in the interpretation of disputed texts. Where a departure from what appears to be their obvious meaning, has raised a controversy among christians; after attending impartially to what has been advanced, on both sides, we shall commonly esteem it the safest course to steer at equal distance, on either hand, from the combatants, directly to that point, where a plain unlettered man would naturally apply to find a meaning. Exactly such a man was every one of our Saviour's first disciples, who certainly had no skill in dialectics, or metaphysical subtleties. Let no human authority induce us to bind upon another man's conscience any proposition, which we cannot to our own full satisfaction find unquestionably

unquestionably expressed in the holy word.

Let us however be always mindful that every doctrine, which perfectly accords, or evinces a direct connection, with it, though unassisted reason had not attained the knowledge of it, though superficial scepticism, on that account alone rejects it, we must not think it enough never to oppose, or call it in question. The whole truth, which we find thus really revealed, it is our indispensible duty to assert and constantly maintain. In doing this, our conduct will be totally dissimilar from either of the two tribes of conceited theological sophists, which are, at this moment, engaged in fierce opposition to each other. On the one hand we behold a sect, who chuse to call themselves exclusively *Rational Christians*, who disdain to acknowledge themselves obliged to Revelation for the discovery of any of the most important truths, yet they would fain persuade us they hold in veneration the gospel of Christ, not indeed as informing them of any point, constituting a new article of belief, not as imparting any new light

light to the clear dictates of their all-ruling Reason. No. It's principal, or only purpose, in their eye, was only to confirm and sanction what the world knew just as well before.

On the other hand, a contention is kept up to prove an irrefragable claim, and sole right to the title of *Orthodox Christians*, founded upon their peremptory assertion, that what is most remote from reason, what the human mind can least apprehend, alone constitutes the essence of the said Revelation. Whatever opinion we may form of these mystical enthusiasts, or irrational expounders of their faith, let us not hastily impeach the sincerity of their profession. They seriously advance a doctrine, with which a * *Dodwell*, with an affected gravity, could ironically sport, a † *Jennings*, with a better disguised solemnity, appeared most earnestly to recommend : that a revelation of celestial original, as it was first propounded to mankind by the aid of supernatural power, is still communicated to the heart of man,

* Christianity not founded on argument.

† View of the internal evidence, &c.

only by supernatural means, his mind remaining totally unconcerned; since it's reasoning, or apprehensive faculty is utterly incapable of receiving it. All faith being the sole operation of the Holy Spirit upon the passive soul, what has man to answer for, to whom all free agency is denied?

Lament we may that any one, who nameth the name of Christ, should declare, in effect, that he is unable "to * give a * reason for the hope that is in him," that he is content to "pray with the spirit," but disclaims all power to "pray with the * understanding also." Let us rather protest, with unfeigned humility, (though fanaticism should stile it impious presumption,) that "in † the church we had rather * speak five words with our understanding" than ten thousand, of which we are neither able nor at all desirous to give a rational account. It has long been agreed, (at least in Protestant churches,) to refer our

* *Be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

1 Peter. iii. 15.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 15, 19.

vexatious

vexatious disputes to the holy text itself. If we honestly wished to understand one another, or *ourselves* indeed, in all we speak, how seldom would any controversy be lasting or passionate? Those humble Christians best approve the sincerity of their faith, who content to look up to the inspired writers as their unerring guides, in every branch of duty, every ground of salutary hope and fear, are always happy when they can clear the primitive track, which lies direct and plain before them, from the soil of conceited glosses.

Yet when they declare that what is thus revealed of these our universal and everlasting concerns, is not mysterious, that the gospel has graciously rendered what is fit for man to know, in that respect, obvious to every eye, which is not obstinately closed or averted, they know full well what they have to expect: they hear the devout admirer of darkness pronounce their love of light, rank infidelity. When they entreat the asserters no less than the opponents of a divine revelation, to beware, lest in the heat of controversy, their arguments, pro and con, shall appear contradictory

tradictory to Reason and to Reason's God;—when they humbly trust, that the Gospel truths are so far always, and so far only, interesting to man, as they are conceivable in the human intellect; that the Imparter of all knowledge, the Father of all lights, natural and revealed, never conferred upon mankind either of these precious gifts to confound or destroy the other:—they will not wonder at the rage of Bigotry, that beholds her rebellious sons withdrawn from their blind submission to her arbitrary dictates. She accordingly with inward shame, and outward haughtiness, loudly condemns what she calls their apostacy from the religion of Christ. She dares upbraid them with making their private self-opinion the sole god of their idolatry. She brands them, in bitterness of heart, with opprobrious appellations, of which she would be sadly at a loss to assign the purport, of Heretic, Arian, Socinian, Infidel, Deist, Atheist.

The first of these blasting titles is, in truth, her own proper designation, though no power of instruction, human or divine, has enabled her, as yet, to apprehend it's meaning.

meaning. Who but her devoted sons, knows not that Heresy, in it's due acceptation, is nothing more than an intemperate and pertinacious adherence to some peculiar religious tenets, unsanctioned by Reason or Scripture? It is that intemperance, that pertinacity of spirit, so contradictory to the docility and meekness of the sincere disciple of Christ, that is still impairing the credit of his religion. To the three last mentioned of it's impious foes, in the above list, Bigotry would be ready to accede; she would assume with them the boasted badge of infamy in utter unbelief; sooner would she wear without a blush, their tricoloured cockade * of modern Wit, sooner far than tolerate a dissenter, in a single iota, from her own inexplicable formulary, or arbitrary system of belief.

In your purpose of vindicating religious truth, you see the mortification your patience is liable to undergo. Yet one con-

* *Pert Infidelity is Wit's Cockade,*

To grace the brazen brow that braves the sky.

YOUNG'S Night Thoughts.

siderable

siderable advantage will accrue to you from the necessity of strict examination, to which the obstinacy of the Bigot will drive you, by the undue stress he lays on the obscure passages he adduces to cast a shade on plain ones. Against these, his torture presses those, to militate. Weak mortal! were his optics clear, he would quickly discern the consistency of both, and how aptly the one was conducive to elucidate the other. Your enlarged view of the scriptural plan, your liberal mode of expounding it, neither narrowed by prejudice, nor distracted by party, will endear it the more to your affections, for the fury of his contention against it. Fail it may of giving entire satisfaction to the Christian Scribes and Pharisees: but it will succeed to a better purpose in putting the Sadducees to silence. You will strike those disbelievers in a future state, those rejecters of the most important and consolatory tidings of the gospel, with a conviction how futile how inapplicable are all their objections to them.

Were all preachers of the gospel to deliver it's blessed tidings with it's own genuine

nuine conciliatory spirit, they would at once disarm those objectors of their only pretence for cavilling against it. Their conduct would thus be marked by a direct contrariety from that of all the jarring sects which have ever disturbed the cordial harmony of Christendom. In the judgment of unassuming piety, they are all reprehensible alike, whether noticed in the arrogant stickler for the absolute perfection of any church-establishment, or the ill tempered caviller, who dissents from it; unaware that his main argument against it bears harder far upon himself, and those of his own persuasion. Could we agree, on all sides, to desist from laying a greater stress on any mode of interpreting scripture than we can solidly maintain, to the clear apprehension of a plain man of common understanding; the world would then have little cause to regret the openly announced, and generally approved consignment of all the abstruse and fine-spun speculations, extracted from the disputed texts, to the * "congenial cobwebs of the Scotists and Thomists."

* Pope.

When

When once laid there asleep, at the benign exorcizing voice of some pure evangelical spirit, it seems probable that no future generation will ever again disturb their peaceful slumber. The loud alarms will then die away unregarded, which have long been continually sounding from opposite quarters, by the furious contenders for the inviolable sanctity of their own separate and contradictory opinions. They are all now exclaiming together, though agreeing in no one point besides, against the "exorbitance of moderation," displayed in the writings of many professed members of the church, who though accounted in the esteem of the public, in the number of it's sincerest and most liberal advocates, are complained of, as encouraging too much the factious scrutiny of bold inquirers—"Are we not aware, they may ask, of the dreaded effects of thus giving way to this growing spirit of free examination? Can it be right to allow it to rush unrestrained to rend the veil of the Lord's temple, that conceals the holy of holies? What can be it's intent in exposing it's sanctuary to unhallowed eyes? What but to remove the mercy-seat from the ark of
 God,

God, after battering down the mystic cherubims that overshadow it? And for what nefarious purpose? To dart a forbidden glance within it, to steal out thence the two tables of the covenant, and abolish at once and for ever all the laws of God."

Allegory apart, great is the alarm lest the imputed temerity of these Latitudinarians should bring into discredit the infallible authority of the church, by bringing it's decrees and tenets to the test of Reason, thus profanely constituted a Judge of their equity and truth. You may possibly have caught a like panic yourselves, my young Friends, from an apprehension of impendent danger of vast unknown extent. Your Addresser well recollects the confusion formerly occasioned by a similar outcry. But let not these terrors industriously spread to intercept, not to communicate information, let not the heavy charge of wilful mischief, of atrocious guilt, in these advocates for impartial reason, deter you from giving to such writers a patient and attentive hearing. Be ashamed to betray a mean distrust of the issue of a fair discussion of the contested

ed articles and canons of our Church. Their salutary tendency, if properly explained, will thus be happily evinced. Let it be again repeated, that the true glory, permanence, and perfection of the church of England can never be so well consulted, as by it's declared encouragement of the exactest survey of all the constituent parts of it's structure. Cleared thus at length from ambiguity, it will acquire new confidence in it's own stability, at every such review. Some of it's respectfully devoted sons indeed have expressed their humble wishes to see it disencumbered from certain outworks, injudiciously raised and kept up for it's defence, but which only serve to provoke attacks. They trust that when it shall display it's bare, majestic strength at full, it will tempt no future insult, it will be alike secure from external invasion, and from internal treachery.

“But is this a time, it may be said, to
 “wink at such departure from implicit
 “mental submission to the wisdom of the
 “powers that be, either spiritual or tem-
 “poral, who are ordained to guide, and
 “for that purpose expressly set over us,
 “by

"by God himself? Is this a season to ap-
 "plaud the too meekly tolerant dispo-
 "sition, and excessive clemency even of a
 "protestant church, in permitting so un-
 "controlled a licence as is now assumed in
 "free inquiry? Can this eulogy, so ho-
 "nourable, when properly applied, be now
 "a just one, when a spirit appears to be
 "gone forth of disputing all, that for ages
 "past has borne the stamp of a revered
 "authority?"

Decide not these questions, without de-
 liberate reflection. On the one hand; it
 is impossible to stop the current of Inqui-
 ry. Opinion is always restive against ar-
 bitrary restraint. It is commanding Rea-
 son alone, that has force to overcome it's
 obstinacy.—On the other hand; the public
 utterance of opinions, threatening danger
 to the security and welfare of a communi-
 ty, requires a prompt but prudent check.
 It is commonly sure to meet with it duly
 provided by the vigilance of every wise
 government.—Here then is the grand ob-
 ject of it's cautious consideration: How
 shall it best and soonest quell the "• motus

• Virg. Georg. IV. 87, 88.

"animorum,

“animorum, & certamina tanta?—Pulveris exigui jactu?” O yes surely—by the most lenient measures at hand. Is not the expediency manifest of the sedate interposition of some calmer spirits, amid the commotions of the conflicting parties, each stubbornly bent to warp the minds of all to it's own several bias? Let them exert their beneficent and useful abilities of conciliatory and mild persuasion. Their pious endeavours are the most likely to succeed in turning the opponent torrents to glide on peaceably together in one proper channel.

At no critical juncture perhaps has it ever become so necessary to shew that what the people are required to submit to and believe, with respect to the doctrines and discipline of the church, the constitution and ordinances of the state, is securely settled, where after all it must finally rest, upon the evidence of sound enlightened reason. Their belief and voluntary submission being the result of a conscientious preference, and clear conviction, will be more uniform, and it's salutary effects on all hearts more potent than the

G g authority

authority of ancient councils and synods. We must, after all, accede to a prudent remark familiar to those, who have studied mankind well : That the result of Free Inquiry, and unbounded Latitude of Judgment is not always, or at least *immediately* favourable to the cause of truth. This freedom, the peculiar glory of our rational nature, may by abuse become a reproach to it. By an excessive overgrowth, in this age, it is declared to be at open war with all established maxims of ancient wisdom. From thence a train of ill consequences are apprehended injurious to the public tranquillity. What will be the issue of this transient chaotic state of popular opinions ? The believer in a righteous God, the Author of all order and harmony, may confidently predict what it will *not* be. Certainly not the final defeat of reason, truth or divine revelation.

But the existent principles, you say, the prevailing taste and manners of the age, too forcibly confirm you in your present despondency. You alledge, for instance, the late rapid and extensive sale of * the

* Age of Reason, by T. P.

grossest

grossest and most offensive abuse of revelation, disgraced by the most notorious misrepresentations of facts, and fallacious arguments artfully deduced from thence, that ever issued from the press. It cannot be denied that both the style and matter of that opprobrious tract are but too aptly suited to the taste of numberless illiterate and unthinking persons of all ranks. Be not overmuch dispirited at the natural currency of a work secure of such powerful patronage, though it has far exceeded that of all that has since been written in defence of religion put together. What the best and wisest of mankind, (in numbers how disproportionate !) ever hold in profoundest reverence, must never hope for a welcome reception among an idle unprincipled multitude, whose vanity is flattered by the matchless audacity of one of their own cast, disparaging the constant object of their dread and hatred. This defiance of all shame he has found to be his ready passport and recommendation to the favour of those gentry, who hear and read, as they speak, without the pains of thought or study. Amongst these, presumptuous Ignorance, under the respectable name

of *Common-sense*, is sure to meet a fond reception for it's oracular decrees.

But let not Britain fear it's lasting prevalence over that sterling *Good-sense*, which still marks the character of her less degenerate sons. Of this excellent property, the result of serious application, sound reflection, and deliberate judgment, but a slender portion, in truth, can she expect to see in the wretched race of unprincipled idlers, whose sole employment, and business of life is to extinguish thought in a dizzy round of frivolous amusement. The fore experience of calamities, public and private, may enforce at length a necessity of thinking, even in the most inconsiderate of those who have not yet lost all capacity for it. They will then, of course perceive the pestilent tendency of the trash presented to them, as alone suited to court their general approbation. They will understand these sunk batteries pointed at our religious creed to be the approaches merely of a deep-laid scheme to undermine our best-established civil institutions.

Our case would be pitiable indeed should
this

this instrument of the Démon of Discord succeed in bringing his precious anarchical projects for amending the defective plan of an orderly government to gain ground in this country. Full clearly are we apprized of their dire effects as they are woefully realized on the neighbouring continent. At every chilling eastern breeze from thence, our ears are duly struck with proper warnings of their baleful consequences. Even his own hard heart has felt them sorely. Experienced misery has not yet, it seems, awakened in it ingenuity enough to recant his political ravings. The crimes and horrors, sprung from impiety wrought into system, his aching eyes have witnessed, and are daily witnessing. Yet he is reported to be at this moment evoking the evil spirits of Oppression, Ruin, and Desolation, from the metropolis of misrule, from whence they are commissioned to issue forth in the garb of Liberty, Conquest and Rapine, imploring they would mercifully deign to visit his dear countrymen, whom they will be sure to find altogether as mad as himself. Whatever cause he might before have dreamt he had for thinking so, by the singular and

unmerited favour of Providence, the unparalleled sufferings of his late associates have outvoiced the cruel exultations of their lawless despots, have opened the eyes of his infatuated old admirers here, and brought them to disown, and almost to disbelieve their past illusion.

But it is not in his assumed political character, that we are now concerned directly to consider him, as in that, under which he has chosen insidiously to present himself, as subservient merely to his main purpose, above alluded to. With considerable natural talents, he has certainly acquired peculiar sagacity in discerning the workings of the uninformed and vulgar mind, in all conditions, from the least regarded among the lowest, to the most conspicuous of the same description, that bring into increasing contempt the highest ranks, amongst whom his infidel notions, of course have met with the easiest, and most welcome introduction. With a conscious superiority over that herd of half-witted mortals, he shrewdly condescends, not only to raise them to an equality with himself, but to advance them, in
their

their own conceits, by their exclusive privilege of Common-sense, far above the men of most improved and exalted understanding, whom the shackles and drudgery of learning have disqualified for the dignity of freethinkers. He excites them preposterously to rush with him into the sanctuary of the Lord, to discover there, not by attentive and diligent search, but self-instructed,—to discover what? not their duty to God, but the duty of God to them, not the supremacy of divine wisdom, but it's subordination to his private judgment, a judgment not informed, as our best reason ever deemed it requisite, by sedate examination, but by his new and curious science of simple intuition, with eyes averted, or obstinately closed.

Is it to such a nation as this, that he presumes to address his crude conceptions, well adapted, no doubt, to the freakish and desultory genius of that, into which he has been appositely admitted a naturalized outlaw? Let us not seriously be apprehensive of their prevalence here over the united strength of the Messiah's faithful host, the body of the British clergy.

We

We should rather rejoice at his provoking them to a more constant and regular application to a peculiar duty of their function, *not quite so generally attended to, as could be wished*, an accurate scrutiny of those sacred records of the dispensations of God to man, of that venerable code of the statutes, judgments and mercies of our Divine Lawgiver, which the exalted genius of our Milton, the profound penetration of our Newton and Locke, the exact examination of our Boyle and Addison, our Littelton and West, men under no professional bias, after meditating impartially, with the most intense application, have regarded with ever encreasing reverential awe, have declared to be alone capable to afford to minds like theirs supreme satisfaction with respect to many truths, of infinite importance, on which the utmost efforts of Philosophy could shed but a feeble and uncertain ray.

Whilst the *voluntary* ardour for the religious truths, that shone so conspicuously in the sacred scriptures to the eyes of our excellent countrymen, is yet retained in our respectful recollection, so long, for
ages

ages to come, I trust, will their uninfluenced, and unfeigned emulation in vindicating the sovereign claim of the word of God to regulate our sentiments and conduct, be still endeared and present to every worthy British heart. Where now are vanished those insect swarms of impious philosophers, who in their days infested the English press, to the great annoyance of feeble-minded Christians? How many of these (whose far acuter tones than those of their wretched mimicks of your time, yet ring in the ears of a few, very few of my contemporaries) have been long swept away to the pool of oblivion? Outlawed from regions, where a sounder reason reigns, less crazed with self-conceit; are they not now seen fluttering, tricked out anew, in all offensive shapes, on the continent of Europe? There a rank Superstition has assumed, for a season only, the form of ranker Infidelity. Reports from thence are gaining ground, though attended, as usual, with various inconsistencies, of many a new metamorphosis, long expected, and lately sprung forth, in the birth-place of ephemeral wonders. They have adopted, it seems, many new modes of different

ferent religious worship, each fickle tribe of votaries recommending it's own with a specious name, and indignantly disparaging all the rest. But as the characters of the several hierophants, or chief ministers of these novel rites are soon blazed abroad, and every one betrays in it's prominent features an utter defect of all moral principle, amid the symptoms of an approaching dissolution, which they exhibit at their very birth, are discernible the germs of many a future change. Where now are to be sought the very names of countless motley sects, and their fanatically ungodly leaders, that in their spawning vanished, in the similar period of ten turbulent years of anarchy, that overturned the settled state of our civil establishments in this country an hundred and fifty years ago? In what this war of discordant elements may terminate, God only knows. He bids us pray for our enemies.—May he ordain the horrible distraction, rout on rout, into which they are still rushing, to strike a speedy conviction in these foes alike to earth and heaven, that no resting waits the sole of unblest feet, till humbled and contrite, they in their turn shall sue for

for that pardon and peace with both, which they have so insultingly slighted.

SECTION III.

Hints from old Experience.

IT has formerly been the fortune of your Addresser to be unpleasantly engaged for many years, in frequent conference with persons, who with all the graces of polished life were conspicuous for their open profession of libertine and infidel principles. During a long course of foreign travel, chiefly in attendance upon the duties of his calling, opportunities were presented of reflecting upon the circumstances, which contributed most to form their character. Among great numbers of gentlemen of the military profession, he found not a few, (though with many most honourable, and highly esteemed exceptions,) rather indisposed for much serious or sober thinking. They were habitually diverted from it, as much at least by the “*strenua inertia*” of peaceful quarters
and

and garrisons, as by the turbulence and bustle of campaigns and marches, battles and sieges. One effect he observed to be generally prevalent in those who lead a life of dissipation, whether in camps or courts, or scenes of fashionable resort,—that whatever religious notions were happily preserved, or occasionally revived in their lucid intervals, were commonly such alone as had been faintly impressed in their childhood, in the unexplained formalities of parental institution, the imperfection of a school discipline, or the apparently fading authority of a church.

But little steadiness of moral principle, or heart-felt influence of piety did they commonly retain from these their earliest, often their only instructors, whose mode of recommending virtue and religion had not been judiciously adapted to excite, or gently to incline them to the exercise of their own private judgment, in discovering their happy tendency. To their constant practice, they had not been pleasingly trained by the authority only of superior reason, always endeared by superior benevolence. The consequence of this neglect was exactly

actly such as might have been expected. Their profession of belief, not being founded upon the rock of rational conviction, was staggered at the slightest puff of vanity, and overborne by the dashing torrent of licentiousness. If on the contrary it had been once established on its just foundation; if their wiser tutors or guardians had taken due pains to instil gradually into their minds, as their growing strength would bear it, the resistless train of evidence for the truth of the gospel religion, the internal excellence of its moral character, its external proofs from prophecy, from miracles, from the rapidity of its propagation; very seldom indeed could it have failed, through a sense of its infinite importance, both in time and eternity, to have taken such hold on the heart, as to render it proof, ever after, against the despicable attacks of modish infidelity.

You will often experience a necessity to remark, that in labouring to bring such men over to a serious sense of religion, as have been for the reasons just indicated, so easily laughed out of it, your task of
greatest

greatest difficulty, but which you are bound most faithfully to discharge, will always be to make them clearly understand, —*what Christianity is not*. You will hear them in mockery declare that—"From the mouth of many solemn propounders of—*what it is*, all they have been able to gather is only this—that it is something utterly remote from their 'business and bosoms,' something in which their reason, their earthly interests and pursuits have no concern at all; and stranger still, that all that is vehemently asserted to be most valuable in it, is by the very preachers themselves declared to transcend altogether the apprehension of all human faculties"—A pert apostrophe of this sort cannot fail to be somewhat disconcerting to the men, to whom it is properly applicable. Let it not slacken, but rather invigorate your zealous endeavours to reclaim their attention to what has been already shewn to be perfectly intelligible, and manifestly most important in religion. This you will clearly elucidate, as well in opposition to the obvious and shallow pretence of Ignorance in the Sceptic, as to the far-fetched inexplicable dogmas of the Bigot; whilst

whilst their purblind defender, and equally fightless assailant, (who both agree in miscalling them Religion,) by turns, or both at once, ridiculously sing songs of triumph over each other.

When the beauty of religion, thus undisguised, and it's energy thus unshackled, has been rationally recommended to his earnest attention, you may have some just hope to see the very man, who so lately spurned at what he did not understand, and presumed it's teachers understood as little, compelled at once to suppress his mockery, and led by degrees to overcome each groundless prejudice against it. This preliminary point you will find it always requisite to keep in mind. The discursive faculties of a reasoning Infidel are habitually wavering and irresolute. You have awakened him from that desperate state of torpid indifference to the essential truths of religion, by proving they may be clearly brought within the scope of his own understanding, which he finds you no longer proudly affect to undervalue. Lest he should thrust you unawares from the ground you have gained, by a sudden relapse,

lapse, now is your time to seize good hold on his heart. This is your critical moment, to make it feel the intimate connection of those salutary truths with the most important present and future interests of his whole existence. To the following articles, in succession, it was upon frequent trials, deemed expedient repeatedly to call, and affectionately to solicit his fixed attention:—That in this transitory state of probation the first stage only is commenced of an endless existence—That all the events of this life are under the constant control of an omnipotent and all-righteous, but most merciful Ruler and Judge, the ever-present Observer of all our thoughts and words and actions.—That the Author of our being will infallibly make all events (calamitous or prosperous, as we deem them here,) conspire together for good, to those who love and obey him.—That to the impenitent “wicked man, though he prolongeth his life in his wickedness,” yet a sure vengeance is decreed; when the day of the Lord shall come, he will be cast from the light of the divine countenance, into outward darkness, and misery, into which he wilfully rushes,

rushes, proudly rejecting all hope of redemption—That the Son of God came into the world to save and raise him to that blessed hope, upon the sole condition of a true repentance—That by a firm persuasion of the truth of these fundamental articles of our faith in the gospel of Christ, and a consequent observance of his holy precepts, he will secure to himself all the advantages, in this life, of that internal peace and satisfaction which results from an enlightened and upright conscience, a never-failing support in death, from his prospect of mercy and acceptance at the throne of grace, with an inheritance of glory, happiness and perfection, in a life to come.

Without boasting his own extraordinary proficiency, and success in promoting, or sagacity in discovering the precarious progress of his well-meant endeavours in reclaiming many a fashionable champion for Infidelity and Libertinism; your friendly Monitor can only say that his patient perseverance, during a long course of years, in a fixed resolution never to decline a fit opportunity of submitting his

H h

adverse

adverse principles to the strictest rational discussion, in a dispassionate conference, with these modish, and often ingenious sophists, has proved, upon the whole, a source of great solid satisfaction to his own mind. It has established there upon sure grounds an indelible impression of the invincible evidences of Gospel truth from which he could demonstrate the impotent attacks of infidels have ever glanced aside. He may, it is hoped, have left in the memory of his opponents a few traces, occasionally conducive to a closer scrutiny of their pernicious principles. If he has been so fortunate, he will presume to add his certain confidence, upon experience, of the happy issue of every fair and impartial trial.

Allow him to subjoin to these few scattered hints, (resulting from some little experience of their importance,) a brief suggestion, the triteness of which may perhaps not suffer it to attract your notice; but which upon trial and reflection, will recommend itself, as highly worthy of it. To him, he flatters himself, it has often approved itself of no slight consequence.—

You

You wish to exhibit to a Libertine Sophist the striking opposition of his maxims and conduct to the laws of the God of nature, who in mercy to mankind, has by an express revelation, evinced their beneficence, their invariable righteousness.— You would fain persuade him to renounce the destructive practices, the delusive and ever-wavering sentiments and motives of the dissolute and thoughtless multitude, by him worshipped, and entitled *the World*. Set this before him in faithful living sketches, exposed in perfectly true, but strong and various lights, drawn from real objects, persons and characters, which you know to have fallen daily under his eye, without once rousing him to serious reflection. Contrast the happiness, the general esteem constantly attendant upon the revered, the *only noble* conduct of those, who from virtuous and religious principles, though necessitated to converse occasionally with those, who are unreclaimable from the career of folly and vicious dissipation, have the wisdom stedfastly to disdain the fashionable frenzy of driving blindfold into the beaten track. Select the liveliest and most familiar instances, as

they can be presented to his immediate observation, and enforced regard. Strive to endear those excellent characters to his affections, engage him, if possible, to join in admiration with you of the inestimable advantages they perpetually enjoy, in the calm satisfaction, harmony, and complacency of an upright mind, in the conscious esteem and merited friendship of all worthy persons, in the joy of all such men at their success, and their general concern at any calamity that may befall them.

You will, in this instance, have adapted your instruction properly to a man, whose attention would in vain be claimed to any but present objects. To the sublime delights, the rapturous elevation of soul of the confirmed religionist, in his private acts of sincere devotion, or pious exercises of sacred contemplation, you will refrain from adverting, till a happier progress shall exhibit unequivocal signs of his growing sympathy in these natural emotions of an exalted piety. Your risque might otherwise be great, that a sudden relapse into his former impertinence, and his rejection, with a rooted antipathy, of
what

what he had always contended not to belong to the condition of humanity, if it bursts upon you unprepared, may discompose, and impel you to break off abruptly a conference, begun with better auspices. In the exercise of your sacred function, common discretion will not suffer you to think you can apply proper remedies to a distempered mind, while you cease to keep a watchful eye upon what the constitution and temperature of the patient will bear. When his qualities of heart and mind are such as indicate the necessity of your observance of the caution, which St. Paul * declares he found it expedient to use, in speaking to the Corinthians, you will not expect to find that relish for spiritual things in him, whose habitual sensuality has never undergone the previous discipline, requisite to subdue it. Knowing the strength of a deep-rooted prejudice in the affections, views and propensities of a man of the world, you will judge what stress should be laid on any of those instantaneous and supernatural attainments of spiritual perfection, those

* 1 Cor. iii. 1. 2. 3.

sudden illuminations of mind in the vilest, most ignorant and most abandoned sinners, of which our fanatical preachers make such mighty boast, as rendering them at once deeply-skilled in the mysteries of faith, of which they at the same time declare it impossible, either for the astonished converts, or their teachers, to give a rational account.

You have not, I trust, mistaken the intent of your Addresser, in the repeated caution, he has ventured to inculcate as requisite to obtain a patient hearing.—Not to load revealed religion with what does not properly belong to it. No check is here proposed to your diligent study of scripture, (ye ingenuous youths, *you* will understand me well,) no incentive has been wanting to encourage your laudable assiduity, in searching for the hidden treasures, inclosed within the grand outlines of the plans of Providence, so admirably traced in holy writ, so highly interesting to the whole human race. These plans, and the simple facts, events and reasonings consequent upon them, you will require the wrangling sophist to regard as what
alone

alone constitutes the sum and substance of all revelation: and these are, in general, plain in themselves, or easily rendered intelligible to almost all alike. You may, no doubt, with entertainment and profit to yourselves, and others, innocently form abstract speculations upon them, regulated by due reverence and modesty: or you may take delight in the like ingenious attempts, in the works of many profound, yet discreetly learned writers; not the haughty imposers of vain conceits, with whom a silly world is fond to go astray, but the sedate announcers of the result of impartial investigation, and deliberate judgment. Only permit me to caution you, that whatever mode of interpretation or comment, of this recondite cast, may have approved itself to your own silent and cool meditation, be never intruded on your intended proselyte, as any thing but the mere effort of human intellect, that claims no positive sanction of a divine authority; especially if it be such, as for eighteen centuries has exceeded the utmost stretch of our limited faculties to explain or comprehend.

Prefuming

Presuming that you bear in your hearts the divine image of your gracious and meek Redeemer, impressed with a far dissimilar stamp from that of the fretful and contentious Dogmatist, as empty of solid and useful knowledge, as puffed with frothy literature; I shall suppose you struck with a lively sense of the most pleasing obligation, he perpetually enjoined, and by his own example so endearingly recommended. It will be your constant aim to incline the affections of men to * "*unity of spirit in the bond of peace,*" not to inflame and alienate their minds one from another, by laying an exorbitant stress upon any point of metaphysical or mystical theology. The engaging excellence and loveliness of this blessed temper, you may be sure, is acknowledged in secret, (though they affect to despise it,) even by those vehement sticklers for a blind assent to what they themselves declare to be so imperfectly revealed, that these *doctrines*, as they are

* Liturgy. Would to God all the members of our Church were blest with some portion of that conciliatory spirit, which dictated it's most excellent prayer for all conditions of men.

pleased

pleased to call them, have indeed no positive or determinate meaning.

" But situations will occur, it may be said, in which a son of the church, without renouncing all concern for the honour of it, cannot easily maintain the placid temper enjoined. To be conformed to the blessed image recommended, must we sit like Patience on a monument, smiling at insult insupportable? In what manner are we to support the provocation, which all of our profession are daily liable to receive from a certain class of libertine opponents.—When an Infidel of this sort * would evince the insignificance of a supernatural revelation, and of an order of men commissioned to enforce it;—when he shrewdly compliments human reason with the attribute of universal and absolute self-sufficiency;—when with unabashed effrontery he asserts that if left to themselves, mankind would always, from the creation, have formed pure, just, and sublime ideas of a Deity, and of his attributes, and of all our duties to him, and to each

* *An admirer, for instance, of Tindal's Christianity as old as the creation.*

other,

other, were it not for the delusive subtilties of those hateful priests of all denominations, pagan, jewish, christian: to the mock sanctity of this ungodly crew is owing all that confusion and disparagement of eternal truth; to those wretches, who seeking to palliate their own vices, have ascribed to God all the failings and infirmities, the passions and partialities, which every perfect moral system pronounces derogatory from the dignity even of that imperfect creature, man—.”

When thus rudely attacked, you would fain know how you are to behave, and what to reply—Not by running blindly into Scylla, to escape Charybdis; not by combating deliberate misreport with wild extravagance; not by depreciating Reason, the steadiest asserter, the best interpreter of the awful, yet hopeful and joyful truths of revelation. With the conspiring aid of both these gifts of God, you may readily convict this impertinent prater of palpable, and too probably of wilful falsehood, Challenge a fair trial of strength with his dauntless and most potent Reason, so proudly disdainful of sacred instruction,
 Invite

Invite it to a calm contemplation, first, of all the absurd, contradictory and manifestly pernicious notions, entertained upon every subject of disquisition, religious, moral or political, by the taught and untaught *multitude* of all ranks, noble or plebeian, and professions, clerical or lay, and of all nations, civilized as well as barbarous. Induce it next to compare to these, as far as the fullest exertion of its own strength can fairly carry it, the whole tenor of the Gospel doctrines and precepts, which you are ever ready to lay open to its free discussion.—Thus met, never doubt the speedy discomfiture of the Sophist, whose insolence, it seems, confounded, and still disturbs you.

“ But the charge still lies, he exclaims, against all your solemn formalists, whether dull or crafty, who denounce the eternal vengeance of heaven upon all, who presume to rationalize Christianity.”—Let the charge light where in justice it may, it cannot fall too heavily. The shame it has unduly reflected upon your honourable function you will of course lament in secret, whilst you resolutely make it appear
that

that this opprobrious imputation cannot be applied to the present temper of the Church of England, by one who is qualified to know and consider it impartially; and that all it's most generally esteemed members have long agreed in declaring the spirit and tenor of the Gospel directly condemns the practice of those, who can still countenance, or apologize for anathemas not less absurd than impious. In asserting to this gross Insulter your own freedom from the imputed guilt, let the serenity constantly attendant upon a conscious rectitude of principle, enable you to overawe the repetition of an outrage easily abashed by the unassuming dignity of a sage equanimity.

Though serene and undisturbed yourselves, though disdaining to be affected upon your own account, let it still be your intimate concern to vindicate the glory of God, and his holy word, from all such misconstructions. Be earnestly solicitous to remove from our *Protestant* Church-establishment the discredit of imposing upon it's members the necessity of approving ex animo, and justifying to the world that
every

every minutest point of it's forms and ordinances, is absolutely perfect, at least, if not altogether of divine inspiration, as are all it's arbitrary, yet infallible interpretations of scripture, in every sentence and word. Be content with asserting it's admirable subserviency, beyond all others, to the best ends of public devotion and instruction. Supremely important are the intelligible and heartfelt Gospel truths, which it propounds, and engages you to enforce to the religious attention of your spiritual charge. Piously respect the heaven-planted root of the tree of life, whilst with all the fervour of an enlightened zeal, you are warily busied in clearing away the briars and thorns which have impaired it's vigour, and obstructed the ready access to it from many a docile and well disposed inquirer.

You know, and can with joy reflect from whence and where a certain recompence awaits your well-meant labours. You know also from whom no thanks are to be expected. Servile contenders there will still be, under every establishment,

for

for an implicit uniformity of opinion in all it's members. The natural constitution of our mental powers denies it's possibility, upon subjects abstruse and liable to dispute. Yet this mode of assent, without inquiry, exactly suits a certain class of men, who are always loudest in condemning the modest claimants of a latitude of interpretation, in all difficult cases, which the general weakness of the human understanding renders absolutely indispensable. —Bidding a last farewell to this "*baseless fabric of a vision*," this unattainable *Uniformity*, to which the Author of our nature assigned a scanty limit, beyond which it cannot extend ; let our Unanimity, within a liberal and comprehensive pale, let our general conformity to an all-perfect pattern, let our general harmony in the Christian graces, Faith, Hope and Charity be henceforward respected as the grand fundamental principle of all true religion. Be these the life, the soul, the prime inspirers of every act of your sacred ministry. Of any speculation, or matter of mere opinion which immediately or of necessity concerns not these, take no account. You will not misconceive my meaning.

meaning. Think not yourselves engaged by your profession *to maintain or enforce it.*

SECTION IV.

Admonitions.

EVER mindful of the beneficent office in society, which you are engaged to fill, you will be constantly solicitous to discharge it in such manner as best may render it, by every act of pure benignity, amiable and honourable in the sight of all. With a delicacy, a sensibility of soul, ever requisite in the character of a clergyman, absolutely free from the slightest taint of affected reservedness or singularity, thus best consulting your proper dignity, you will chiefly emulate "whatsoever things are true, are honest, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report, if there be any virtue *," from whence due praise results, let the beauty of these qualities be as conspicuous in all your conduct, as the Apostle

* Phil. iv. 8.

enjoins

enjoins them to be present in all your thoughts. Mark well that the first preeminent grace in the respectable list recommended by this inspired writer, who always makes it appear he knew mankind well, is *Truth*.

It is your peculiar province to raise the sons of men to an elevation of soul above this perishable state, to reclaim them, from time to time, from the petty concerns of worldly business, and the dissolute pursuits of fleeting pleasure, to objects more worthy to engage the attention of a being, disciplined here to the commencement only of an endless progress in perfection and happiness in a life to come. This must bring perpetually to your minds your obligation to evince in practice, that your own hearts are sincerely penetrated with this awfully inspiring truth. Thus will the constant tenour of your character manifest to the eyes of the most hardened infidel, that yours is not that empty phantom of religion, which can assume every capricious shape, which your groveling temporal views require it to put on: it is not that accommodating disposition, that

can allow you to comply with any of those licentious habits, offensive to the laws of wisdom and decency, in the modish haunts of dissipation. Raised by your own free choice to a station of eminent consequence to the present and future interests of mortal and immortal man, you have invited the public eye to a continual and strict examination of the real harmony of your hearts with the utterance of your tongues, without which the latter, at best, is but the harsh tinkling of an untunable cymbal.

Let it not be said that you can be drawn, with the ardour of the slaves of prevailing folly, into those frivolous objects of their desires, of which you can occasionally, with a ridiculous eloquence, display the emptiness and vanity. Undazzled with the glitter of a world, the fashion of which, ere we can well snatch a glimpse of it, so suddenly passeth away, let it clearly appear, and let no part of your conversation contradict that appearance, that you are persuaded yourselves of the reality of that everlasting glory, to which you vainly urge their hopes.—The whole tenor of this

Address will not permit you to mistake me here. It is not to a life of solitary contemplation that it supposes you called by your clerical office. It is, on the contrary, impossible to discharge it properly, without conversing with mankind, without mingling incidentally, as circumstances will require, with their business, and sometimes, within the bounds of decency and discretion, with their amusements. It is by such acts as discover an affectionate and sincere concern for the welfare of men, that you must study to acquire that salutary and friendly interest over their minds, that may enable you to rectify their mistakes, with respect to their interests in time and eternity. It is by thus meriting, without meanly courting his confidence and regard, that you shall disarm the most petulant scoffer of the power of despising you, reviling your function, or insolently withholding a certain portion of deference due to the authority of undissembling and light-inviting Truth.

It is only upon two occasions that a professed advocate for the religion of the Gospel can be compelled to shrink, with serious

ous apprehension, from the keenest scrutiny of it's most determined foe. First, when the practical habits of the preacher are at variance with the moral standard, sanctioned by the divine revelation, of which he declares himself the faithful interpreter, or when devoted with a bigoted zeal for some inexplicable system of speculation, he sacrifices to that shadowy object of his adoration all regard, all hope of salvation, to that humble piety, that displays itself only in acts of justice and beneficence, in an uniform love to God and man. You are told that you live in an age, when true piety is fallen into general disrepute, and that all moral obligation grounded upon it, is treated in the *world*, not with indifference only, but with contempt and derision. It certainly is not the worthiest, or wisest part of it, who tell you so. When happily it shall be in your power to converse more intimately with persons of an opposite character, who from experience and reflection, possess a competent knowledge of mankind, without being tempted into their sordid pursuits of ambition or avarice, or deigning to mingle in their vices and follies, you

will learn from them what judgment to form of these intemperate censurers. They will direct your own observation to discern, in daily proof, that they who delight the most in upbraiding are seldom qualified to judge, and most rarely to mend the times by their own exemplary manners or engaging eloquence.

Of our countrymen, at least, allow me to put you in the way of learning to speak less uncandidly. The opportunity of *observing* perchance may not fall in your way. Consult the most judicious among our present numerous tribe of Tourists. It is in England alone, they will tell you, that the unnatural child of spleen is to be found, who takes delight in aggravating every blemish, real or imaginary in our national character. But attend to those, who have fortunately enjoyed the benefit of forming an extensive acquaintance among country-gentlemen of easy independent fortunes, neither hackneyed in the trammels of a party, nor palsied in the vitious dissipation of a town life, who have also reflected seriously upon what they have remarked of the manners of the gentry,

try, in any foreign nation they have chanced to visit : to them is most apparent, (with a glow of heartfelt satisfaction, they will assert their full persuasion of it,) to them is known, is given the power of demonstrating the superior manliness, liberality, truth, intrinsic worth of *Britons* of the same rank. Nevertheless, though the exaggerated charge of universal and extreme depravity, against the present generation, and this people in particular, is in some degree confuted by the acknowledged merit of many approved and justly respected characters, that still continue to bless and adorn society, throughout every district of this peculiarly happy * Island :—no less true it is that the sweetly temperate voice of rational piety, and sage decorum is too often drowned in the din of wretches of a quite opposite stamp.

From a partial view of the worse or disadvantageous side of men and things, persons of a certain cast are continually overwhelmed with melancholy forebodings. But let not their disheartening strains ener-

* *Et O ! sua se bona norit, still secure, if—procul civilibus armis.*

vate your best endeavours. Do they not tend to persuade the despondent half-witted moralist, that in circumstances like these, when the world is grown so desperately wicked, he has only to skiff for himself, without an idle waste of time and thought upon a public so utterly unworthy of it? If the understanding of such a man is too scanty to comprehend the invincible power, the everlasting prevalence of truth, lead him to contemplate the state of the world, moral and spiritual, when Christianity was first promulgated. How disdainfully, how obstinately averse were all the sentiments and habits of the Jews and Gentiles from the precepts and example of the holy and immaculate Jesus? The Redeemer of mankind, by an express declaration announced the effect, and it's natural consequence to his faithful disciples: “ * the world therefore hateth you, because you are not of the world ;”—“ for I have chosen you out of the world: and † this I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good

* John xv. 19.

† John xvi. 33.

cheer,

cheer, I have overcome the world." Incredible and truly miraculous was the victory, which he predicted his pure doctrine would speedily obtain over the minds of wretched mortals, immersed in the sordid business, the baser pleasures, the most despicable pomps and vanities, that engross the attention of the besotted vulgar of all conditions. Inspired with this divine assurance, not the weakest of his followers shrunk, or resigned his soul to despair, at sight of a world, more proudly far, and far more generally, than at this day, confederated against the decrees of heaven, in the establishment of the Gospel of Christ.

Consider well the men, who instead of trusting to the word of our Saviour, or believing his power to be infinitely superior to that of his adversaries, persist in pestering our ears with their fretful and dispiriting surmises lest the temporary frenzy of weak mortals should overthrow the eternal wisdom of Almighty God. Observe the tendency of their habits and prejudices. Search attentively for the scope of their views and connections. Inquire especially how far their worldly interests are involved

ed in the perpetuity of some system, upon which most assuredly the essence, the internal fabric of Christianity, does not rest. Advert to the grounds of their religious notions. Are they derived from their own earnest and sober examination, or the instruction of liberal and judicious thinkers? Their sad forebodings will indeed most commonly be found to proceed from existent ills, which, with them, we sincerely lament; but of which they are without skill to find a cure, without capacity to ascertain the rise, the progress or extent, without a due resignation to the Supreme Wisdom, to which alone belongs the issue.

If however, instead of pitying their impotent complaints in secret, as might be most advisable, you are led yourselves into a like extreme, of becoming hopeless, at the present aspect of the religious and moral world: at any rate, let not your belief of this prodigiously encreasing prevalence of libertinism and infidelity afford you a plea or excuse for abating the rigour of the gospel precepts. Never entertain the dastardizing notion, that an openly and
uniformly

uniformly declared respect for God and religion, exemplified consistently in practice, can fail to produce a good effect. Whether it shall succeed or not, in reclaiming the ungodly to a degree of imitation, it will always command, however openly slighted, in the worst of times, their internal esteem and reverence. Let this persuasion be ever most feelingly present to your minds, that nothing can lower you so much, in the judgment of persons of all denominations, however inconsistent in principles and conduct themselves, as your meanly bringing down the standard of evangelical purity and righteousness to the level of any corrupt prevailing fashion, which it is your especial duty to discountenance. Great prudence is requisite, no doubt, and some insight, acquired by experience and reflection, into the frame of the human heart, to discharge this duty with good effect. Examine with accuracy, but with candour and tenderness, whatever unhappy circumstances may have chanced to bias minds, weak and fallible by nature, (like your own, in truth,) but not utterly devoid of truth or honesty—what could impel them to differ
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so widely from you in a matter of infinite and eternal importance!

With these modest and compassionate assumptions in their favour, at your first setting out, you will persevere in keeping at equal distance from adulation and obloquy. From the strict rigour of your principles you are not here admonished to depart one jot, in complaisance to their unfortunate prejudices, or disorderly passions. Be mindful still, instead of opprobriously denouncing these, as marks of a reprobate mind, irrecoverably doomed to eternal perdition, past redemption; that it becomes not sinful man so to judge his brother. Represent to the impenitent Libertine the perilous state, into which he has reduced a soul destined by its Creator to be disciplined here for a state of far greater purity and perfection in a life to come. Arraign him not of the desperate guilt of wilful enmity against God, of that "sin unto death," for which it is declared that all prayer is vain. Rather express your wish to impute his crime to a fatal perversion of judgment, through the ungoverned frenzy of passions, originally implanted in
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our nature for beneficent purposes, and reclaimable still by the divine mercy. That mercy, you are warranted by your faith in Christ, to proclaim accessible yet to a repentant sinner.

This discreet and candid mode of remonstrance to those, whom you wish to reclaim, this considerate attention to their circumstances, character and situation in life, their most untoward prejudices, consequent upon these, will preserve you from the mortification of self reproach, for having provoked, to no purpose, the indignation of an erring fellow mortal, the object of your unfeigned pity and goodwill. It may do more: it may win you access to his heart, it may induce him insensibly to comply with your request, to suspend his judgment, to reflect with coolness, to consent at length to examine with you maturely, and with counsel fairly sifted, the wrong notions you mean to rectify. These happy opportunities of working a salutary change in his sentiments you must not expect will frequently occur. When they do, be always mindful to approve yourselves the faithful disciples

ciples of Christ, as never ashamed of him or his words, as dauntless and sincere asserters of the cause of truth and righteousness. As trusty guides in the way to salvation, teach the honest inquirer to persevere in the most direct path, which is happily cleared of those rocks of offence, that might obstruct his progress in it, bidding him note well, to the right hand and the left, the distracted movements, as well of the bigot as the infidel, who each one "thinking that he standeth, taketh no heed lest he fall." "Keeping your own heart with all diligence, (for out of it are the issues of life.*)" still maintain that conscious superiority of strength, which your judicious vindication of the fundamental articles of genuine christianity, independent on the most specious glosses of mere human authority, will constantly insure you. Certain victory will ever attend you, when engaged in defending it with the weapons alone of true heavenly temper, drawn from the sanctuary of God.

You are admonished to consider well the several modes, too generally used, in expostulating with an obstinate freethinker,

er, or insulting libertine. They are such as can seldom fail to bring discredit to a good cause, and to yourselves vexation and disappointment. However painful be the shock, you may be liable to sustain from their offensive fallies, not all your vehemence and bitterness, though compounded with the sharp and sarcastic humour of a * *Bentley* or a † *Warburton*, will either correct them, or avail you in vindicating yourselves or the gospel. Your own deliberate judgment, after all, must determine how far the mildest rebuke, or most candid reasoning will be only a fresh provocation to grosser outrage. You will consider how far (secret scorn, shall I say? —no, you are christians, and they your brethren—rather how far) silent compassion, in such a case, may be the properest answer. The exigence, no doubt, may sometimes be such as to impel you to withdraw, in visible disgust, from the company of men, whom no good principle, no law of decorum can properly restrain. In a contest with extreme impudence and folly, wisdom, nay benignity itself, has

* Against Collins.

† Against Bolingbroke.

commonly

commonly no better course to take, than to retreat discountenanced, lest the *Monster* *, before whom you have cast your pearls,

* You may see this appellation judiciously applied to him by *Sir R. Blackmore*, in the well-adapted Preface to his truly valuable Philosophical Poem on the Creation.—“ All ages have brought forth some MONSTERS, “ some professors and patrons of irreligion ; Monsters “ in respect of their scarceness, as well as deformity ; “ but the amazing abundance of these odious productions is, I believe, peculiar to this age. Most of those “ who were reckoned Atheists in former reigns were “ rather unbridled libertines, than irreligious in principle ; but now we are so far advanced, that the infection has seized the mind ; the Atheist in practice “ has become one in speculation.—Should Atheism, “ and corruption of manners (which as cause and effect “ mutually introduce each other,) prevail much farther, “ and generally infect the higher ranks of men, it would “ be impossible to find men of principles to fill the “ places of trust and honour.—The disposers of preferment would bestow all on those who embrace their “ opinions, &c.”—Your Admonisher wishes to recommend to your candid perusal the solid good sense of this Preface, and the important instruction forcibly conveyed in the Poem. They were introduced, in his earliest youth, to his respectful notice, by a revered Parent, intimately acquainted with Blackmore. His prose, indeed, is not in graceful ease, like that of Addison, his verse, in elaborate polish, like that of Pope. To his writings, Addison excepted, his contemporaries were disingenuously hostile, very unlike the good-humoured Knight,

pearls, should turn again eager to rend, though impotent to harm you, “* begirt as you are with truth, protected by the breastplate of righteousness, and covered with the shield of faith.”

Knight, whose universal candour was most eminently conspicuous. To the more brilliant talents of his bitterest revilers, Dryden, Pope, and Swift, he was pleased at all times in doing ample justice. In opposition to the party-spite of their detractors in his club at Button's, he would often applaud their most striking beauties with peculiar emphasis. His becoming a main pillar of the club was owing to the decline of practice in his profession, through the attacks of those malignant wits, whose fame he so generally befriended. This rancour he would indeed provoke by his honest condemnation of every man, of any sect or party, the hollowness of whose heart or maxims he disapproved. Thus he lamented the shameless apostacy of Dryden from the Protestant faith, though his *Religio Laici* clearly shewed he well understood it's true ground, the all sufficiency of scripture, as a rule of faith and manners. He laughed at the pitiful inconsistency of Pope, a professed Romish Dissenter, railing at the act of Toleration. But his most marked indignation was at the base ambition of Swift, who renounced his adherence to the vital principles of our free constitution (which they had imbibed together from their common Patron, Sir W. Temple,) despicably proud of becoming the tool of a ministry convicted of conspiring to undermine it. Excuse this length of note, for the noble peculiarities, it exhibits, for your imitation, of a character so amiably frank and generous.

* Eph. vi. 14.

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With the defence afforded you by these excellent properties, you will yet consult your own security and comfort best, by avoiding all fruitless intercourse with those, in whom their contraries are seen to predominate in so great a degree. A little observation will afford you sufficient insight into the real characters of those impious scoffers, to give you notice when your best endeavours to reclaim them will certainly be deemed quite useless. Wherever a deplorable experience has taught you to expect that this licentious mockery will not only be tolerated, but approved, as a fashionable ornament of conversation, you must be well aware that a serious reply can be productive of no good effect. It will at best be accounted ill-manners by these self constituted arbiters of the civility in vogue. It will have good luck, if it shall escape being rudely stiled hypocrisy, and contemptible affectation. Can a mind possessed, even in the lowest degree, of a sound judgment, of one religious, one moral principle, be amused, be present without loathing and abhorrence, at scenes like these? Can it ever be credited that any one really desirous to maintain the dignity

dignity of the clerical character, or in any measure that of a decent and worthy man, can have ears, and hear all regard to God and religion brought into disrepute; can have eyes, and see every thing that is held most sacred exposed to the laughter of fools, for a most dishonourable purpose endured with patience, in complaisance to some graceless patron, some unprincipled man of quality, opulence or power, who seeks for shelter in profaneness from a grave monitor within, of whose censure he dares not stand the test? Dismally abject is your poverty of spirit, justly consigned to that ignominy, which you seem to court, if you can thus, by your presence gratify the vanity and give a sort of sanction to the modish ribaldry of such a degenerate man of rank, whose pretensions to wit, politeness, common civility, or any quality that constitutes the character of a gentleman, are as ill founded as to right reason or good morals. You renounce yourselves all claim to that respected character, if you can tamely, without expressing, or appearing to feel a generous indignation, bear an offence against the insulted majesty of heaven, which you

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are bound by so many honourable ties to resent.

But how, you ask, in these extreme cases, will it best become a christian to shew a noble resentment? Your own heart will readily prompt this sole expedient. Let the arrogant ruffian see that, for no consideration upon earth, will you ever submit to risque a repetition of the insult. Remorse and anguish of heart await the recollection of your voluntary converse with such a miscreant. If your principles are as yet untainted, away—Breathe not an instant their pestilential air. If you have not a proper sense or discernment of the danger, your constitution is too visibly prepared to receive the contagion, and too weak to sustain it's violence. If no concern for the indelible blot you bring upon your own reputation, no regard for the glory of God, can move you, be assured of this; that the very leaders and abettors of this impious fashion themselves, with whose ungodly mirth your unmanly compliance, and accommodating manners have pitifully temporized, will be the first to deliver you up to deserved and general contempt.

CON-

CONCLUDING SECTION.

Valediction.

WELL intentioned and seriously considerate as it is hoped you will approve yourselves, my young Brethren, “ we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” A timely sense of your highest honour, and the sacred obligations of your profession, will infallibly determine you to a fixed resolution never to renounce these, or sacrifice them to a low ambition, or party interest. It matters little or nothing in what degree of disregard you are held by persons, whom you are henceforth bound to look upon as wretched objects of your just indignation. Their favour or friendship can never tempt you more, when once duly rated and nobly disdained. In their enmity to your holy faith, to the insulted majesty of heaven, you will contemplate only the certain presage of their signal defeat. In the mean time, suffer

not your spirits to be too much depressed by the heavy complaints, and lamentable discourses public and private of your less consistently pious brethren. Request them to think soberly upon the obvious tendency of their passionate utterance of these diffident apprehensions for the permanent stability of Gospel Verity, of their declarations that all the reasoning faculties of mankind are in arms against it; that it is now, as of old the fabulous Astræa, upon the wing, to fly from the earth for ever. Of their precious efforts to arrest her flight, you are more properly instructed what to think. You know better how to express your trust in God, and his eternal attributes.

Upon the deplorable objects of their dire execrations, and present horrible surmises, you can look down with far different emotions. You can piously commiserate their speedily approaching doom. You can implore a gracious God to render their utter discomfiture, their despair itself an occasion of leading them through outer darkness, through wailing and gnashing of teeth, first into deep contrition, gradually

to a true penitence, and prayer for mercy; and finally to a reviving hope of obtaining it. Your perseverance in cherishing this evangelical temper in your own hearts, your delight in a regular and exemplary discharge of your duty will be rewarded with the heartfelt compensation for every outrage your charitable expostulations and remonstrances may have brought upon you, in a perfectly upright, clear, and modestly approving conscience.

Your spirited assertion of the supreme excellency of every virtuous, every truly Christian principle, will reflect fresh lustre upon an office, which the wishes of all good men, and the common concern of every well-ordered society require to be supported by a conduct uniformly decent and respectable. And to crown all, by this due improvement of your talents, you will assuredly receive this approving sentence of your Lord and Master: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."—
That

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That you may all, with an uniform and constant ardour aspire to this most elevated hope of a Christian, is my affectionate farewell wish.

I am,



My respected young Brethren,

Your faithful Friend and Servant,

JOHN DUNCAN.

*South Warmborough,
1st March, 1799.*